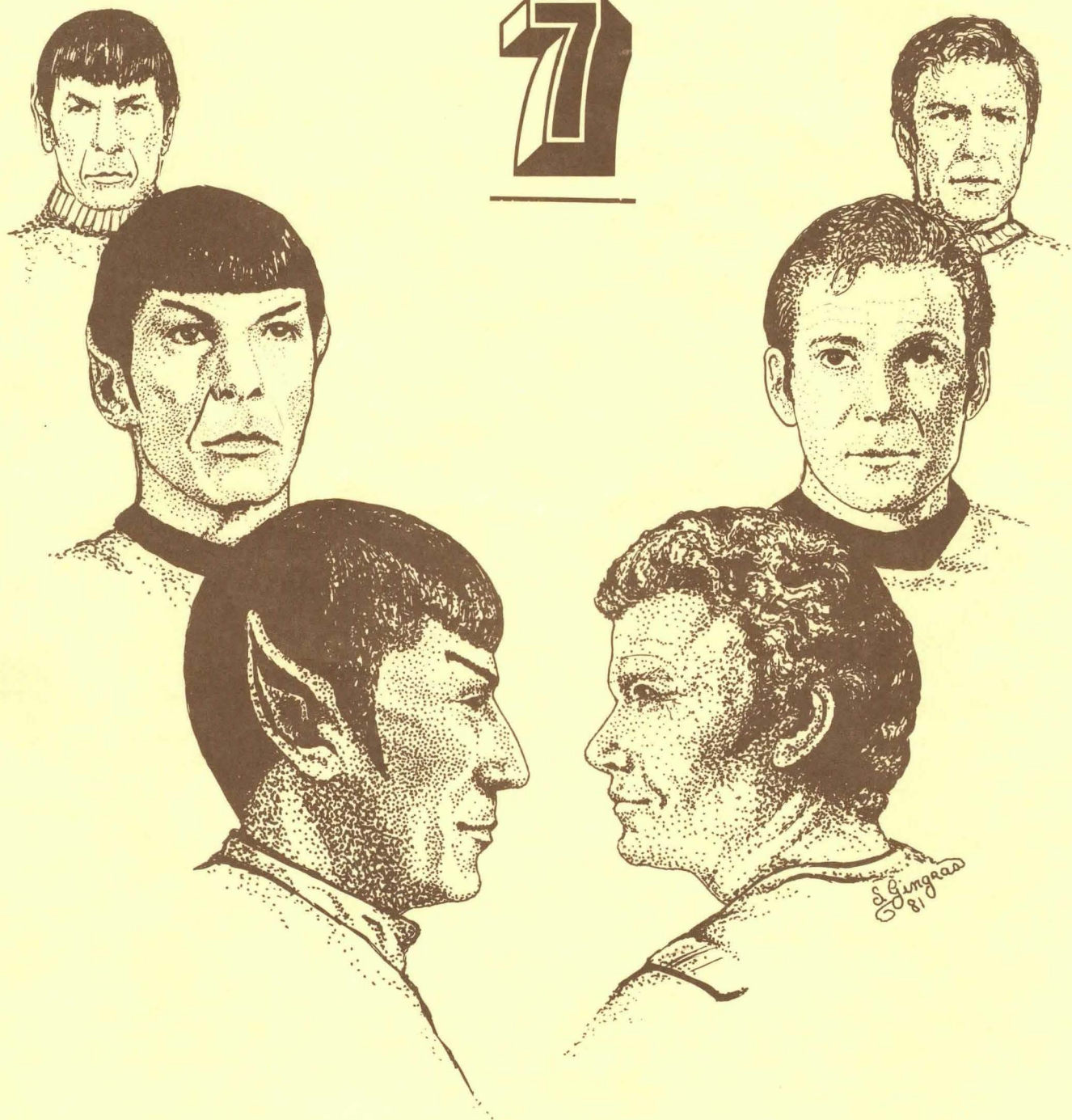


CONTACT

7



CONTACT

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COME BACK AND LET'S BEGIN AGAIN
OVER THE STAR-DOTTED VOID LET'S REDISCOVER
NEW SECRETS ABOUT EACH OTHER
TRUST IS ESSENTIAL. I SEE YOU REACH OUT
AND QUICKLY I GRASP YOUR HAND TO
CONFIRM THIS ELUSIVE LOVE WE ALMOST LOST...
THIS... IS OUR ANSWER,

We dedicate this issue to six friends who have been regular contributors to CONTACT almost since its beginning. They have demonstrated their devotion in issue after issue, and been a part of the growth of this zine through the many changes in the Kirk/Spock relationship.

For MARTHA BONDS, MERLE DECKER,
LAURIE HUFF, SUSAN K. JAMES,
GINNA LACROIX and CRYSTAL TAYLOR.

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Front Cover: SONIA GINGRAS

All calligraphy (except p. 131) by CHERYL A. BOBBITT



EDITORS' PAGE

CONTACT 7 celebrates the Continuation of the Dream, a changing progression from the Old to the New. As we have followed the developing friendship between Kirk and Spock over the last eight years, we have experienced their trials and triumphs, their sharing and their long, two-and-a-half year separation. We have seen tragedy and tears, comedy and chuckles, understanding and misunderstanding. But most of all, we have witnessed their growth. Now they are back aboard Enterprise, they have defeated the Earth's foe and faced their own demons. Once again they prepare to meet, together, whatever awaits them... out there - thataway.

CONTACT continues to explore this relationship, in all stages of its growth and with speculation about the future. "From the old, comes the new..." words to a song, applicable to this issue, for included within are both pre- and post-motion picture stories and poetry. We had considered presenting the material in chronological order, from series to screen and beyond, but our real purpose is to demonstrate the blending of the two, to show that love endures, despite the onslaught of time and circumstance. While change is inevitable, the quality of that love is the one constant in the universe.

Friendship cannot be measured by standard means. It is an intangible state that manifests itself in ways too varied to be acknowledged. CONTACT has long been the recipient of this priceless treasure, and we, too, recognize the inadequacy of trying to define it in words. Yet, one of the ways we have often witnessed its presence is by means of support. CONTACT would not exist without the support of its friends, as we suspect each of our favorite subjects would have difficulty existing without the support of the other.

We'd like to acknowledge, now, CONTACT's special friends.

Our "Baltimore" group (lovingly and complimentarily dubbed the "Contact Group" by fandom, although several other zines are also the by-product of this creative mass). Truly, CONTACT would not succeed without your love, help, friendship *and* support. This zine is as much yours as it is ours. Each of you, in your own way, contribute of yourselves to make our combined efforts a reality. To *Martha, Marion, Margaret* (try saying those three fast in a crowded room!), *Terri, Bonnie, Cheryl, Suzanne, Kathy, Gerry, and Carolyn...* We love you.

The Contributors... Working with the creative talents of authors and artists affords an editor the chance to get to know them as people. Drawn together by our mutual desire to share something meaningful and enjoyable with the rest of fandom, we have all pulled toward a common goal, greater than its individual parts. Through this means, we count ourselves fortunate to have had the opportunity to get to know each of you and to count you among our friends - new and old.

The Readers... who support us financially (it's not mercenary to acknowledge we need funds to exist) and with enthusiastic response and encouragement. Many of you date back to our first issue, in 1975, and have continued with us throughout the years. *You are why CONTACT is.*

The friendship and love of Kirk and Spock endures, '... no matter what someone who thinks he's wiser tries to do.' CONTACT shall endeavor to endure, also. Issue #8 is planned for publication in February - we have already accepted several submissions (see ads), but more are needed as we continue to grow. NO! (Get ready for the shock) We are not saying that this is our last issue! And that, in itself, is a first for CONTACT.

WE ARE ONE... WE REACH,


Bev & Nancy

IMAGES



Ginna LaCroix

The spray was flying high as the sailboat rapidly cut its way through the choppy water, covering the three men who were sailing her. The strong sun blazed down from a cloudless sky and the wind blew without pause.

McCoy grimly hung onto the wheel that Kirk had abruptly left in his care. He blessed the fact that they were well out from shore and he didn't have to worry about ramming into anything.

But, as concerned as he was about trying to hold the flying boat on a straight course, he could not help but notice the easy way that Kirk and Spock worked together to lower and tighten the sails. McCoy knew that Spock's sailing experience was minimal, as was his own, yet that steel trap mind had recorded every sail position and he was experiencing no difficulty in following Kirk's orders.

To Kirk, standing on the slippery deck was as natural as standing on the bridge of a starship. McCoy knew that Kirk had purchased this sailboat shortly after becoming Chief of Operations for Starfleet and from what he had learned from other people who had worked with Kirk during that time, the boat had quickly become his life. He would spend every spare minute he had either working on her or out sailing the blue waters around San Francisco.

McCoy mentally shook his head over the suffering that all three of them had endured over the past few years - stupid, needless suffering. If only one of them had used his head at the end of that mission, if only one of the them had held together long enough to talk some sense into the other two, it never would have happened. Talk about three men hitting a mid-life crisis all at the same time...!

"Bones, for pete's sake, hold her straight! You'll have one of us over the side if you're not careful!"

Kirk's voice snapped McCoy out of his daydream and he quickly turned his full attention to guiding the boat. A few minutes later Kirk and Spock finished securing the sails and McCoy gratefully relinquished the wheel to Kirk.

"Sorry, Jim," he said with an apologetic smile.

"That's okay," said Kirk, "you're a doctor, not a navigator." They both laughed at the familiar line that McCoy used so often when he was annoyed.

McCoy got to his feet. "Seeing that I'm not as seasick as I thought I would be, I guess I'd better break out the food, that is if you have no objection, Captain, sir..."

"None from this department," said Kirk with a smile. "As a matter of fact, I'm starving!"

McCoy swung down into the small galley and started dishing out the food he had brought. He had managed to get a variety that would satisfy the three of them. As he was working, he saw Spock swing around the mast and make his way back to the stern where Kirk was sitting. For a moment he stopped what he was doing and stood looking at the two men as they sat talking.

They've changed, McCoy thought to himself. Jim's grown. The boy I once knew has lost all his illusions about life, about people. He's been through a personal hell and an even better man has emerged. He saw Kirk get up, the solid muscles in his bare chest and arms rippling under the dark tan.

"Hey, Bones, what are you doing down there? Growing lettuce for the salad?"

"Be right up!" McCoy turned back to the food but his thoughts were still on the others. *Spock's found an inner peace I always thought would elude him. How often I've nagged at him to let himself feel, to understand it's not wrong to depend on other people - to share his good points, and his bad. Yet he had to endure almost three years of sackcloth and ashes on that inferno he calls home before he finally discovered what had been in front of him all the time...*

"Doctor, are you in need of assistance?"

McCoy jumped, startled at the nearness of Spock's voice. He had not heard the Vulcan come down the ladder. "Blast it, Spock, you should know better than to creep up on people!"

Spock's eyebrow rose slightly at McCoy's unexpected outburst. "I assure you, Doctor, I was not creeping."

McCoy grinned, a little embarrassed at his own startled reaction. "Sorry. How about taking this up and I'll bring the rest of the stuff." Spock looked at him silently for a few moments, then nodded and took the plate filled with sandwiches, McCoy following behind with the rest of the food and holding a thermos of drinks under his arm.

The wind had dropped slightly while McCoy had been in the galley and the boat was quietly skimming across the water. Kirk sat with his arm dangling over the wheel, instinctively correcting the course as the wind threatened to tug the boat off its projected line.

Spock was inspecting the sandwiches when McCoy reached them. Kirk was already happily munching on one filled with peanut butter.

"There's peanut butter, Spock," said McCoy, "roast beef, and some cucumber and watercress..." He saw the Vulcan's eyes brighten at the sound of the last combination. "I'll bet you haven't had one of those for a long time."

"Indeed not," said Spock. "Neither of those ingredients are found on Vulcan."

"Especially not on Gol, I'd wager," said McCoy. Then he caught the warning look in Kirk's eye and fell silent. He still really had no idea of what attempting to undergo the Kolinahr had cost Spock, what sacrifice and discipline had been demanded of him as an acolyte, nor of the tremendous toll it had taken from him.

Spock had told Kirk a little about it. He had told him of his final, painful acceptance of the impossibility of his divided natures ever being able to accept and cope with the tremendous disciplines. Kirk had sat in silence listening to Spock's hesitant, pain-filled explanation of why he had left - of what he had been so desperately searching for - and why he had come back.

Spock had not allowed Kirk to respond, the dark eyes warning him that the pain of the last years was still too deep, that as yet he could not deal with pain other than his own.

As always, Kirk had accepted Spock's explanation even when he didn't really understand it. He had protected Spock from the others when the Vulcan had first returned to the Enterprise, even when he had been so obviously hurt after Spock had rejected his welcome with no hint of explanation. Kirk had not let any of the others question Spock, nor had he let McCoy's often devastating needling get out of hand. Even now, weeks later, Kirk still protected him. Spock needed time to heal, to cope with his determined decision to return to his former life. He needed time to relearn how to exist with the often illogical emotions of the Humans he worked with - to learn again to be the alien among Humans - and to learn to deal with the emotions he had finally openly admitted that he felt for the one man so important in his universe.

McCoy poured iced tea for all of them, then leaned back against the side of the boat enjoying the light spray that fell from the rising waves. He chuckled quietly as he watched Kirk pressing a peanut butter sandwich on the somewhat reluctant Vulcan, knowing there was no way that Spock was going to be able to refuse.

"Come on, Spock, you've eaten peanut butter before!"

Spock looked longingly at the last cucumber and watercress sandwich, then took the sandwich that Kirk was holding out. Kirk grinned as he turned back to the wheel and slowly swung the boat around so it was facing the far distant city. The sails again filled with wind and the boat dug deeply into the choppy water.

"All I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by..." McCoy spoke so quietly as to almost go unheard, his eyes on his Captain and his friend. Kirk's eyes met his and, for a moment, memories surfaced of the awful experience with the M5 computer, but that experience had forged an already firm friendship even deeper.

"She's not as tall as that ship, Bones," Kirk said quietly. Spock glanced up at him, not sure what the two of them were talking about. Seeing that Kirk's thoughts were obviously far away, he silently substituted the untouched peanut butter sandwich for the last cucumber and watercress and settled back to enjoy it.

"No," agreed McCoy, "but you have one that is..."

A smile crossed Kirk's face at the mention of the Enterprise, the lady he had once so foolishly given up, the home to which he had finally returned.

"...And," continued McCoy, "this is closer to what the poet was writing about - the sea, the sky, the wind - things that are missing in space."

Kirk glanced around. "I guess some things are destined never to change."

McCoy nodded. "And some things should never change."

Spock had finished his sandwich and looked up at McCoy's last statement. "That is illogical, Doctor. Life brings change. Nothing remains stationary, not even something that appears as unchanging as the sea. There are constant changes, perhaps not apparent to the naked eye but there nonetheless."

McCoy's blue eyes darkened for a moment, annoyed that Spock's infernal logic had once again succeeded in destroying a precious moment. "I was speaking figuratively, Spock," he said, his annoyance sounding strong in his voice.

Spock looked surprised at McCoy's angry response but before he had a chance to answer, Kirk's quiet voice broke in. "I hate to be the spoilsport, but I have to be at an operations meeting in a couple of hours. We'd better get ourselves ready to head home."

"I don't want the wheel!" said McCoy, a sudden fear running through him that Kirk would expect him to guide the boat while he and Spock worked the sails.

"Don't worry, Bones," said Kirk with a laugh, "I paid too much for her to let you smash her on the rocks. Spock can get the sails down while you hold them out of the way. We'll roll them once we're docked." The three of them fell to their work and yet another impending argument between Spock and McCoy was averted.

Kirk was almost ready. He ran a brush through his hair as he tried to remember where on earth he had left his wrist communicator. He remembered seeing it in an unusual place but for the life of him he couldn't remember where that was. For a moment he stood silent, his mind going over his various routes of the past few days and the likely places his communicator might be.

A slight noise disturbed him and he looked up to see Spock standing in the doorway. His dark eyes were locked on Kirk's figure and Kirk had a sudden uncomfortable feeling that he had forgotten to put on an important piece of clothing. He resisted the urge to look down, returning the Vulcan's look steadily, wondering what was holding his attention so completely.

Finally Spock walked forward. "Admiral..." The voice was low and congratulatory. He had never before seen Kirk in the dress of an Admiral of Starfleet Command.

Kirk grinned, suddenly realizing what Spock had been looking at. "They don't boot people downstairs, Commander, not even insubordinate officers of flag rank."

A slight smile tugged at the corners of Spock's mouth. "Your promotion was a logical step, Jim. That uniform does, however, add to the symbolic honor."

"You mean I look dashing," said Kirk with a laugh, knowing full well that the uniform fit his trim, muscular figure to perfection, accenting his broad shoulders and narrow hips in a way many females had found irresistible, and they had provided one small way by which he had somehow managed to partially keep his sanity during those long, lonely months after Lori had left.

Spock nodded, an open smile fighting to break the austere face.

"However," continued Kirk, "this dashing hero is going to get his butt kicked if he can't find his communicator and is late for that operations meeting."

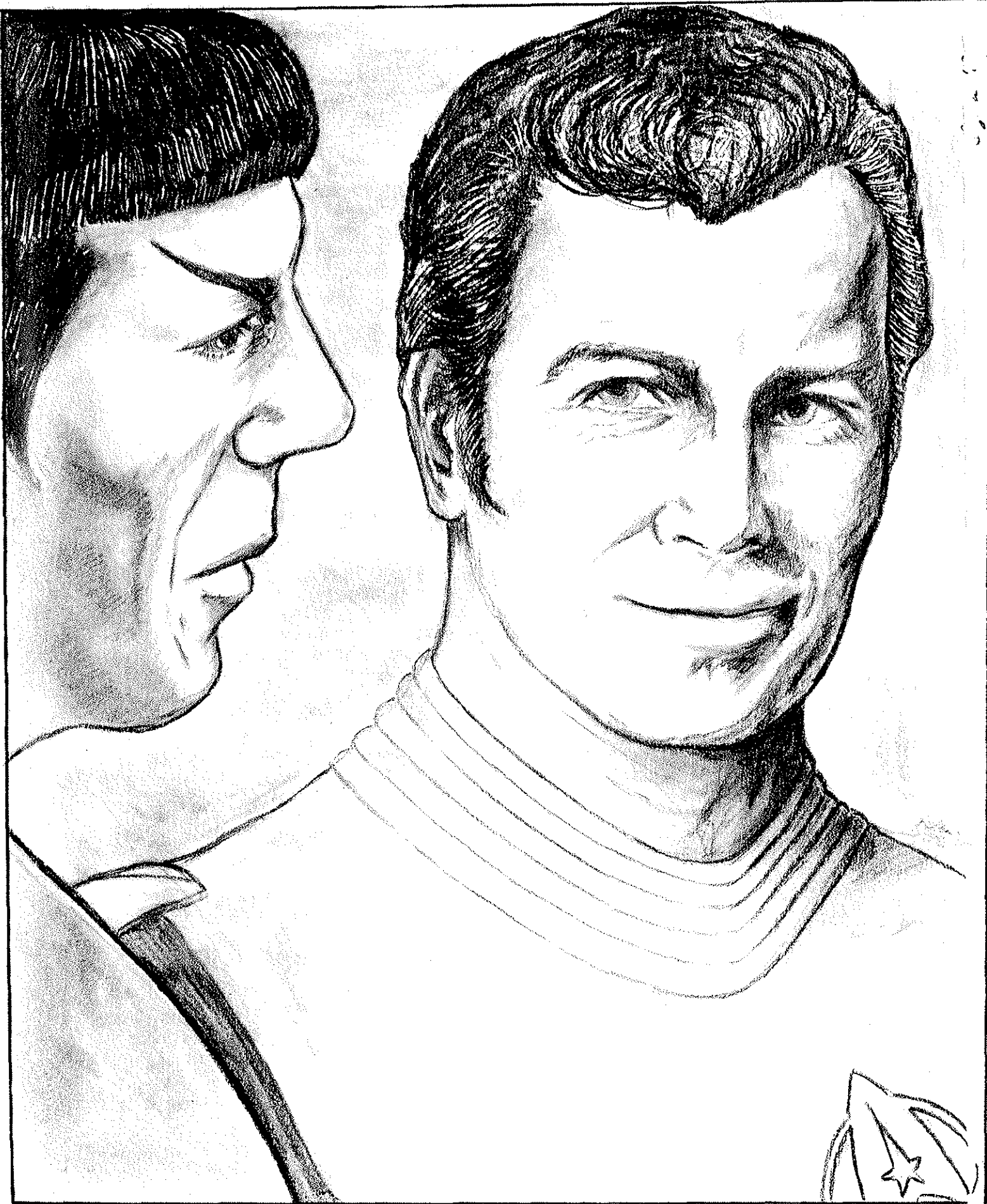
"Your communicator is in the pantry next to the popcorn," said Spock without a moment's hesitation.

Kirk looked at him for a moment. "Is there anything you don't know, Spock?"

"There is a great deal that I do not know. However, I am usually observant of my surroundings..."

"Yeah, sure," interrupted Kirk with a grin. "Well, I have to go out to dinner with Admiral Nogura and some of his cohorts after this meeting so I don't suggest waiting up for me." He moved to the door. "Beside the popcorn?"

Spock nodded. "Third shelf up on the left hand side."



The music was playing quietly as Spock walked into the book-lined study. They were staying in the large house that Kirk had purchased in the hills high above San Francisco. As a member of the Admiralty and as Chief of Operations for Starfleet, he had had to do quite a bit of entertaining and so had acquired the large stone house for that purpose. It had also turned into a refuge of sorts where he could get away, where he could be among his beloved books and the few possessions that would remind him of the life he had led, the life to which he had so desperately wished to return.

The study was Kirk's haven. It was here that he had shyly shown Spock and McCoy what it was that he held important in his life. It was a comfortable place with warm, burnished wood bookcases lining the room, a large mantled fireplace dominating one wall, surrounded by deep, comfortable, leather-covered furniture. An antique oak desk made from the wood of one of the 'original' Enterprises stood on the opposite side of the room from the fireplace, a beautifully detailed miniature clipper ship standing proudly on it, her tiny sails filled with an invisible wind, sailing on an invisible ocean.

McCoy was sitting in one of the deep armchairs watching something on the wall viewscreen. Spock had been there for a number of minutes before McCoy noticed him.

"Does it make any sense to you, Spock?" he asked cheerfully.

An eyebrow lifted as Spock thought of an answer. "It does not strike me as something that would interest the Captain enough to have purchased it," he admitted as he looked at the screen, at the image of a woman who appeared to be wailing into an old fashioned microphone.

"My thought exactly," agreed McCoy, "so I asked him about it. He said that Admiral Ciani was interested in old films so they had joined a society that showed old movies - some actually dating back to the twentieth century. He said this one really caught him, but I can't see that it has any redeeming qualities whatsoever." He glanced at the chronometer. "Oops, it's getting late. I've got a divisions banquet at the Surgeon General's tonight and if I know Ganaud, I'm not going to be in any shape to try to steer an aircar afterwards. I'll probably stay in town tonight. Hope you don't mind being by yourself."

"Not at all, Doctor. I am sure you will enjoy being with your colleagues."

"Well, I'm not so sure," said McCoy with a grin, "but there's no way to avoid finding out. See you tomorrow." With that, he bustled out the door, leaving Spock alone, the viewtape still running.

Spock paid no attention to it. His eyes ran slowly over the room, savouring all those things that Kirk loved, all those things that belonged to the man he had finally had the courage to reach out to and admit need.

He got up and walked across to the bookshelves, his eyes running over the many varied titles, books that covered a wide range of subjects, books that could only just begin to satisfy the inquiring mind of their owner.

And he accuses me of insatiable curiosity, thought Spock to himself as he moved closer to the fireplace, and to the fire that was crackling on the hearth. *Gold flames...gold like his eyes...*

Slowly the words from a song sung by the woman on the viewscreen penetrated Spock's mind as he stood looking at the fire. At first he did not pay much attention to them - he was watching the flames, his thoughts far away. Finally the words forced him to listen, and suddenly he understood why Kirk had purchased such a ridiculous viewtape. This last song was saying it all. It covered a lot of emotion - a lot of hurt. And it asked questions that Spock knew Kirk would never ask anyone but himself.



The fire was eventually only glowing embers in the dark room. Spock had sat for a long time, his stomach a hard lump in the middle of his body. He knew he had hurt Kirk by leaving. He had tried to explain why he had done it and even though he knew Kirk didn't really understand why he had gone, he had accepted Spock's explanation and had welcomed him back.

Now a simple song sung from the depths of someone's soul more than three centuries ago showed him all of Kirk's pain.

"The Rose." A simple title - simple words. A rose - a fragile flower, the thorns a small protection from life, yet like everything else it could be so easily wounded, so easily killed.

These were words that Spock knew Kirk had listened to, words that Spock knew with certainty that Kirk had cried over, just as he had listened with hot tears stinging the back of his eyes. The song was sung with emotion, with a desperate loneliness that Spock had rarely heard, but easily understood.

Sighing quietly, he got up and put more logs on the fire, then ran the tape back and sat down again to let the words flow over him, letting the voice reach to his soul.

*Some say love, it is a river
That drowns the tender reed.
Some say love, it is a razor
That leaves the soul to bleed.
Some say love, it is a hunger,
An endless, aching need.
I say love, it is a flower,
And you its only seed.
It's the heart afraid of breaking,
That never learns to dance.
It's the dream afraid of waking,
That never takes the chance.
It's the one who won't be taken,
Who cannot seem to give.
And the soul afraid of dying,
That never learns to live.
When the night has been too lonely,*

*And the road has been too long,
And you think that love is only
For the lucky and the strong,
Just remember in the winter,
Far beneath the bitter snows,
Lies the seed that with the sun's love
In the spring becomes the rose.*

Again the room fell silent. Slowly Spock stood and rewound the tape, then took it from the machine. His mind was filled with images of Kirk - of Kirk sitting on the bridge when he had first walked out of the turbolift - the look of astonishment turning to welcome and then puzzled hurt. Then the same later in the Officer's Lounge - the welcome, the puzzlement, hurt, then anger - but never condemnation. Kirk with great trust in his own instincts was willing to wait until Spock opened to him.

"How I've hurt you," said Spock softly. "There is no way I can ever make it up." He had not really ever let himself realize how much he must have hurt Kirk by abruptly walking out of his life. Not until this moment - not until he had let those simple words tell him of the loneliness of another - a lonely cry in the darkness, a question which had no answer because the only one who could answer was no longer at his side.

The words were about the Vulcan, not about the Human who was so alone. Kirk had never been afraid of love, had never been afraid to express love, yet he had never once pushed, never once pried as McCoy had so often pried. How could he have been so blind? How could he have caused so much pain to the one person he had always loved...?

Then Spock shook his head. Recrimination would get him nowhere. The damage had been done but it was not irreparable. He had come to his senses enough to reach out his hand and it had been accepted. They were together again. Kirk had his ship and his crew and they were together. Nothing else mattered.



Kirk leaned back in his chair and stretched. He wondered if there had ever been an operations meeting that didn't turn out to be an absolute bore. This one was finally breaking up after several hours of senseless bickering about senseless rules.

Kirk found himself wondering how he had managed to put up with this garbage for the number of years that he had. *I must have really hit a low point*, he thought to himself, *if I honestly thought that I might have made a difference...* A hand hitting his shoulder brought him out of his daydream.

"Ready, Jim?" Kirk glanced up to see Admiral Nogura standing beside him. Nodding, Kirk rose to his feet. His stomach was letting him know that it was more than ready for dinner.

The dinner was ordered and drinks were served all round before Nogura spoke again. "You've definitely decided about the Enterprise, haven't you, Jim?" Kirk looked at him in surprise. He thought they had hashed this out weeks ago. He nodded but didn't say anything.

Nogura frowned. Kirk had not risen to the bait as Nogura had hoped he would. He looked around the table and noted that no one met his gaze - no one except Kirk. And that was the reason he didn't want to lose him. Kirk was the only man of flag rank who dared to stand up to Commanding Admiral Nogura, and that meant a great deal to the Admiral.

"Jim..." he started.

"No!" Kirk's voice was very low but his eyes were like granite.

"Admiral Kirk, I am your commanding officer..."

"Not any longer, sir. I am now under the jurisdiction of Operations, not the Admiralty..."

"You are still an Admiral, sir..."

"Here, yes, but on the Enterprise I am a Captain and I value that position far more than I ever have these stars." He got up. He suddenly realized why Nogura had brought him here along with the other operational heads. The old man had not yet given up his hope that somehow he would get Kirk to change his mind and not take the Enterprise for a second mission. He suddenly knew he had to get out, had to leave before Nogura had a chance to start these other lackeys harping on the same subject. "If you will excuse me, sir," he said quietly, "I have another appointment." He nodded formally to Nogura and left before the Admiral had a chance to stop him.

By the time he left Fleet Headquarters he was boiling mad. Briefly he thought about heading straight home but decided that he would only take his anger out on Spock and McCoy and that would hardly be fair. He decided to take a long walk and let himself cool down before he had to face anyone.

The streets fell away under his feet. He paid no attention to where he was going, nor did he notice how long he had been walking. With his hands buried deep in his pockets, his eyes fixed on the pavement in front of him, he let his anger carry him far away from the areas he was familiar with and deep into the heart of the city.

Gradually he became aware of other footsteps. He looked up to see that he was slowly being surrounded by a group of people - Human and alien. He slowed his pace a little and they closed their circle. He drew to a halt, noting that some of them were pulling what looked vaguely like Klingon disruptors.

"What do you want?" he asked quietly.

One of the men started to answer, only to be stopped by what appeared to be the leader of the group. "Silence, Leim," he said sharply. He looked at Kirk. "What is Starfleet doing in Sadag?"

"Where?" echoed Kirk. "I don't understand." He slowly brought his hands forward reaching for his communicator as unobtrusively as he could. Suddenly everything went black.

Spock jerked awake, wondering what it was that woke him. The room was dark and the house was silent. He lay still for a few minutes but there was nothing in the peaceful silence to disturb him. Finally he rolled over and went back to sleep.



"Who are you?" The voice came again and again, asking the same questions. "Why are you here?"

Kirk's head was pounding. He was tied to an iron bed, his wrists wired to the bars at the head of the bed, his ankles wired to the bottom. His hands and feet were long since numb but the pain in his wrists and ankles let him know the wire was digging deep.

A hand slapped across his face. "Answer me, Human! I know you are conscious!"

Kirk finally opened his eyes and looked at his tormentor. Cold alien blue eyes looked back, the eyes of a murderer, the eyes of a man Kirk realized he would have to humor if there were any hope of getting out of this situation alive.

"James Kirk."

For a moment the man stared at him. "Admiral - Starfleet Command. What position do you hold?"

"Captain, Starship rank..."

"Admirals do not command starships!"

"I do. The U.S.S. Enterprise..." His voice broke off as the hard hand hit him again.

"You lie! The Enterprise belongs to the one named Decker. You were sent here, but why were you sent in uniform? Why did Starfleet want us to know they have discovered us? Why did they not come in force?" He stood looking down at Kirk, at the blood that was running from the corner of his mouth and the bruises that were forming from the constant blows. "Trebe is coming," he continued thoughtfully. "We will wait for him."

To Kirk's horror, the man pulled a dirty looking needle and syringe from his pocket - an old, barbaric looking device. The man laughed as he saw Kirk's expression. "So, Human, this worries you, does it? I take it you have never mainlined. I thought all of your rank would have known the pleasures of herrash."

Kirk shuddered. Herrash was a powerful narcotic and, if used often enough to become addicted, it could destroy brain function in a Human. He had known many people whose careers had been ended by this drug. He knew that it was a rare case that recovered after a long, tough fight, and almost always with some lasting damage. If that happened to him there would be no possibility of command - no Enterprise - not if this man carried out his threat.

"Please...no...!" Kirk's voice was cracked and dry. He had not realized he would find it so easy to plead, but suddenly that didn't matter. He couldn't let all those painfilled years come back to hold him in their grip. Not now, not when life was once more held out before him, not when he was so close to regaining all he had lost.

"Just a little," laughed the man, "just enough so that your body will cry for more. Just enough so you will realize that you can't fight us. We can bring you peace - relief from your agony..."

The wire tore Kirk's wrists open as he struggled. He could feel the warm blood running down his arms as a strap was fixed around his upper arm. The man pulled the sleeve up until he found the big vein on the inside of Kirk's elbow. There was nothing gentle about the way he injected the drug. The grimy needle tore through Kirk's arm as he continued struggling. Some of the drug went into the vein, the rest into the muscle around the vein. Kirk could feel the instant pain and reaction to a drug that burned and destroyed muscle tissue on contact. It was meant to be injected intravenously if it was used at all. His arm instantly began to swell.

"Now that was stupid, wasn't it, Admiral?" said the man nastily as he pulled the syringe from Kirk's arm. Kirk was sickened to see the man wipe the needle on his own dirty shirt, then inject himself with the same drug. But the effect on him would be much different than with Kirk. The herrash which could so easily destroy a Human scarcely affected an alien. It would give a pleasant high then would wear off, leaving no ill effects.

The man called out and some others came into the room. "He's been injected and it's time for us to leave. He must not be found by others." He motioned to them and they quickly untied Kirk from the bed, then forced him into a small, filthy closet. There they securely tied him with more wire, his hands behind his back, then he was pushed to his knees and his wrists were wired to his ankles. Then they stuffed a gag in his mouth and left him locked in the darkness.

As the long hours dragged past, Kirk could feel the effects of the drug sweep through his system. His stomach churned as the foreign substance gripped him. He felt sick and weak which he knew was a first reaction to the herrash. He slumped sideways against the wall. He could handle this with no great difficulty provided they didn't give him much more. The alien had said he was injecting just enough to keep him from fighting. Maybe they felt that if they kept him feeling sick that it would be sufficient. He hoped so anyway. Maybe he could brazen this out - appear to be more affected than he was. Maybe then they wouldn't reinject him.

He made several useless attempts to get more comfortable but however he shifted his position, the wire dug deeply into his skin. Then, suddenly, he was doubled over by violent cramps. The gag prevented him from crying out, but his upper body jackknifed forward, fresh blood running down his hands as the wire cord dug even deeper into his wrists. The pain left almost as quickly as it had come, and he slowly pushed himself back up the wall, sweat starting to run down his face. He desperately wanted to be sick but forced himself to keep control. With the gag so tightly binding his mouth, throwing up was not a good idea.

Hang in there, Kirk, he thought grimly. *You've been through worse than this.* So, in his dark prison, locked away from the world with no one to miss him or wonder where he was, Kirk began a silent, solitary fight for survival.



Spock paced restlessly around the house, wondering where the others were. McCoy had said that he would probably stay in the city overnight but Kirk had said only that he would be back late - and he had not come back at all. Spock did not really understand the restlessness that held him - he felt only that something was not right. Still, he was reluctant to contact anyone. A Vulcan did not function by emotion, and he had no logical basis for his uneasiness. He decided he would wait a while longer before he acted.



The bright light from the main room momentarily blinded Kirk as the door opened. He quickly turned his head away, the movement causing sharp jabs of pain to shoot through his head. However, the headache was almost all that remained of the scary symptoms that spelled the presence of herrash. The cramps had subsided and, although he still felt slightly queasy, he knew he was no longer in danger of throwing up.

He lay passive as the wire bonds and gag were removed and he was pulled from the closet. Momentarily he tried to move on his own and instantly confirmed what he had suspected - his feet were too numb to feel. He would have to wait for a while before he tried anything. At the moment he wouldn't be capable of going anywhere on his own.

They pushed him into a chair, then all left except the one alien who had given him the drug earlier. Kirk glanced at him, then looked away, more because the light hurt his eyes than being unable to face his captor.

The alien mistook the movement for fear. "Well, now," he said with a chuckle. "I would have thought a pretty uniform like that would give a little more courage to the man who wore it." He got up and poured a glass of water, then turned back to Kirk. There was no mistaking the look in the hazel eyes - the Human wanted it. "I find I get thirsty after the herrash has worn off. Do you find the same?"

For a moment Kirk looked at him, then nodded silently. He would play this game if it could buy him some time. The pain in his hands and feet was telling him that his circulation was starting to return.

The alien smiled. "Do you want this?" he asked, holding up the water.

Again Kirk nodded.

The alien got up. "What do the manners of your society require you to say?"

Kirk swallowed hard. How much humiliation was he expected to undergo? His voice cracked as he spoke, his mouth feeling as though it was full of cotton. "Pl...please."

The alien laughed. "Very good, Admiral." He walked forward and held out the glass. Painfully Kirk reached forward. Just as his hand touched the glass, the alien tipped it and the water poured out onto the floor.

"Oh, too bad," said the alien, savouring the horrified look on Kirk's face. "Well, maybe we'll try again later. Water doesn't come cheaply, you know."

As he turned back to the sink, Kirk took his chance and broke for the door. His action caught the alien off guard and he almost made it. Almost, but not quite. He was slowed by the remaining numbness in his feet and was tackled just as he reached the door. His head hit the wood with a tremendous crack as he fell forward, and he lay stunned on the floor.

"Now that wasn't a nice thing to do, Admiral," said the alien as he rolled Kirk over with his foot. Kirk lay on his back, his head threatening to split open. He had miscalculated and he knew he was going to pay for it. He struggled feebly as he was pulled across the room, but his vision kept swimming and his hands and feet were still numb from being tied for so long.

To his relief he wasn't put back in the closet. He was dragged to a corner where he was pulled into a sitting position and his hands were tied behind him, then secured tightly to a building support that was visible behind one of the many holes in the room's walls.

Kirk sagged back waiting for his head to stop spinning. He scarcely noticed that his shoes and socks were being removed. Suddenly he froze. His pant leg was being pushed up and the strap secured around his calf. The alien was holding the needle and syringe in his mouth.

"No! Please...no!" He kicked out but he still couldn't really feel where his feet were. The alien sat heavily on his legs, effectively pinning Kirk to the floor. Kirk felt the sharp sting of the needle going into his ankle, and the painful burn start as more of the drug went into his muscle.

The alien got up and turned to face him. "That was double the last dose, Admiral. You should have been nice to me. I wouldn't have given you another shot if you'd been nice to me."

"Go to hell!" said Kirk savagely, trying to let his hate and anger conquer the cold fear that had clamped his stomach into a hard ball. But the alien only laughed as he moved away. He was looking forward to the next hours. A Human's reaction to herrash had always fascinated him and he rarely had a chance to watch one newly exposed. Usually he only saw those Humans at the clinic whose dependence was already firmly established - and who were dying. This one was strong and as yet full of fight. He settled himself onto the bed where Kirk had been tied, and sat back to watch.

Kirk still wasn't back when McCoy finally called in late afternoon. By then Spock had stopped caring about Vulcan emotion and told McCoy of his fears. As usual, McCoy did not doubt what Spock said. When it came to Kirk and the subject of his safety, Spock never exaggerated and, to McCoy's knowledge, he had never been wrong.

He told Spock that he would start a quiet search to see if anyone had seen Kirk and that he would meet the Vulcan at Fleet Headquarters. He hoped there was a simple explanation for Kirk's disappearance but was experiencing a sinking feeling that there wouldn't be.

By the time Spock arrived, McCoy had traced Kirk's steps until he had left the Officer's Club the previous evening. After that time no one had seen him or heard from him. Spock and McCoy contacted everyone they could think of, even people they knew Kirk probably hadn't seen in years - and drew a complete blank.

They sat in silence for some minutes, then Spock looked at McCoy. "We should contact Security, Doctor. There is no way the two of us can search an entire city."

"Or possibly a country or a world," said McCoy, his fear and frustration sounding in his voice. "Okay, Spock, I'll come with you, then I've got to see Admiral Nogura."



Kirk fought the drug as long as he could, desperately trying not to let himself become an object of amusement for the alien who was watching him from across the room. He put up a valiant struggle but the drug was too powerful and he eventually gave in to the terrible cramps and nausea that were wracking his body.

Finally Kirk sagged limply forward, exhausted and depleted from the raging of the chemical through his system. He heard the alien get off the bed and move to his side. Weakly he lifted his head. He watched as the syringe moved toward his other leg. He found he didn't have the strength to move. He watched the needle puncture the flesh and the clear fluid leave the syringe, then leaned his head back against the wall.

"Why? Why are you doing this?"

The alien looked at him and, for a brief moment, Kirk almost thought he saw a look of sympathy. "You are suffering," he said simply.

"And this is supposed to help?" asked Kirk in angry astonishment.

The alien nodded. "This one will. You have been sick because your body was not used to the drug. This time you will feel the joys of herrash, not just the horrors."

Kirk felt cold dread. Joys could mean only one thing, that his system would accept and accommodate the drug - the first step to addiction. He looked down at the small dribble of blood on his ankle - an innocent wound that could spell his destruction. He took a deep breath and braced

himself. It surely was only a matter of time now before someone would come looking for him. By now either Spock or McCoy would have contacted Starfleet and listed him as missing. San Francisco wasn't all that large. Someone would find him. He just had to hang on until then.



Security raised a general alarm and discreet inquiries were begun by security personnel. Spock was making an increasingly difficult attempt to hold onto his temper as he tried to convince an equally stubborn Lt. Commander that he and McCoy had already done all those things that the man had ordered the details to do, and it would be more beneficial to expand the inquiry rather than to go over ground already covered.

Admiral Nogura met them at Security Headquarters. "Commanders," he said shortly, "come with me please." Spock and McCoy glanced at each other, then followed the stiff, retreating back of the Commanding Admiral.

No word was spoken until the door of Nogura's private office closed, then he turned to the two officers. "All right, what is going on?"

Spock stepped forward as McCoy opened his mouth to speak and smoothly cut him off. He knew McCoy was upset and worried about Kirk, and apt to say something he would regret later.

"Captain Kirk left yesterday afternoon to go to an operations meeting, sir, then he was planning to go to dinner with you. He said he would be late returning." Spock's dark eyes held Nogura's unflinchingly. "He never returned."

For a long moment Nogura looked at him, then glanced at the report in his hand. "Yet you waited until this afternoon to report it. Why?"

"Kirk is not a child, sir," said Spock, his voice sounding respectful even though his words did not. "He is not used to having a curfew put on his activities."

Nogura's eyes shot to Spock's face but met only a challenging silence.

Atta boy, Spock! thought McCoy gleefully. *Don't let this bully make you back down!*

Nogura cleared his throat, then thought better than to take up Spock's quiet challenge. "All right, your comments are noted. Yet you feel this action is unusual for Kirk..."

"The Captain normally contacts one of us if his plans change," said Spock quietly.

Nogura nodded. "Yes, the 'Admiral' always did the same here..." His eyes locked with Spock's but again the Vulcan refused to back down.

"Admiral," broke in McCoy, "I am not familiar with the proper procedure in cases like this..."

"Cases like this?" echoed Nogura, quiet anger sounding in his voice. "Cases like what, Doctor? I don't think you appreciate the gravity of the situation. It is not just a man who is missing, it is the Chief of Operations for Starfleet Command..."

"But he resigned," said McCoy stubbornly.

"Doctor," said Spock quietly, "you are missing the point. The Admiral means that Jim could be a weapon in himself..."

"What? Spock, you're making less sense than he is..."

"If you will let me finish, Commander," said Nogura impatiently. "Kirk is one of the most dangerously informed people in Starfleet, Doctor. He knows every movement of every ship and practically every officer in the Fleet - he ordered most of them. If he has indeed fallen into the wrong hands and if they should manage to obtain that information..."

"Oh boy," said McCoy, slightly stunned at the implications. He looked at Nogura. "Admiral, since I am not assigned to Headquarters, I need your permission to use the medical monitoring lab."

Spock glanced at McCoy, wondering what the Human was up to. "For what purpose, Doctor?" said Nogura, making a visible effort to control his temper. He was not used to people making a stand against him as Spock was doing. The Vulcan's dark eyes were condemning him for something, although Nogura did not know for what.

McCoy looked at Spock for support and got it, even though the Vulcan had no idea what he was going to suggest. Their exchange was not lost on Nogura.

"At the moment, sir, we have no idea if Kirk is alive, or where he is. Part of that might be answered if the medical section tried to hone in on his medical monitor. I can't order that done without your permission..."

"Of course!" broke in Nogura, "I was stupid not to think of it. Come on!" Nogura walked quickly from his office with Spock and McCoy right behind him.



A foot none too gently pushed at Kirk's ribs. Kirk groaned and tried to move away, but his arms held him firmly secured. A tall, rather good looking man turned to the alien standing at his side.

"What did you give him, Tandy?"

"Just a touch of herrash, Trebe, enough to keep him docile."

Trebe looked back down at Kirk's slumped figure. He had obviously been given more than a touch, and had been given herrash more than once. The blood on the man's wrists and ankles bore mute testimony to the useless struggle he had put up and the struggle he had lost.

"Untie him, get him onto his feet," said Trebe as he turned away. He did not look back until all sounds of movement had died away and he turned to see James T. Kirk, Chief of Operations for Starfleet Command standing in front of him. He looked at Kirk in stunned silence for a moment, looked at the damning uniform of the man's rank, then turned to Tandy. "Of all the people in this city, indeed on this entire world, you had to pick on this one? Tandy, it's bad enough to kidnap a Starfleet officer in the first place, much less one of flag rank, but do you have any idea who this man is?"

"Said his name was James Kirk," mumbled Tandy defensively, a little angry and confused that Trebe wasn't overjoyed by what he had done.

"Exactly, James Kirk. And if he isn't the most important man in Starfleet he must be pretty damn close. This city will get turned upside down when they discover he's missing!"

"Don't see what's so special about him. We've taken others before..."

"Those were men on merchant lines who had information concerning cargo that we needed. Those men lived nomad lives - no one would ever question their disappearance. This man is the Chief of Operations for the entire Fleet! There's a big difference there, Tandy, a very big difference which you..." Trebe broke off and stood looking at Tandy. The alien had obviously been dabbling in herrash again himself and was too strung out to follow any line of reasoning at the moment. Trebe would have to wait for the drug to lessen its hold before he tried to explain further.

He turned back to Kirk who was now being held upright in the secure grip of a man on either side of him. The hazel eyes were dark and defiant, even though the drug still held him and the ravages of the beginning of its conquest were more than evident.

"Well, Admiral," said Trebe, "it is indeed an honor to meet you. Of course all such as we know of James Kirk and his accomplishments."

"What do you want of me? Who are you?" Kirk's quiet voice was amazingly steady considering the number of injections of herrash he had been given. Yet, to Trebe's surprise, Kirk appeared to have held some measure of control. It was obvious that he was susceptible to the drug but he clearly had not yet been totally dominated by it.

"To be truthful, Admiral," replied Trebe just as quietly, "I really don't know what we're going to do with you. You're too dangerous to keep and too dangerous to kill. Yet there must be a reason why you came to Sadag..."

"What is Sadag?" asked Kirk sharply, but with an uneasy feeling that he already knew although he couldn't remember.

"Come now, Kirk," said Trebe, "you know the answer to that. Why else would you be here?" Kirk opened his mouth to reply but the man had already turned away. "Tandy, I think we'd better give him some more herrash - keep him quiet for a while longer until we can come up with a plan."

"No!" Kirk knew he couldn't fight another shot and he was terrified of what would happen. He twisted in the grip of his captive's hands and the sleeve of his uniform tore. Large, ulcerated sores covered the inside of his elbow. Trebe looked at Tandy.

"He struggled. The needle slipped..."

"Needle?"

Tandy nodded. "Only thing I had handy."

"Yours, I suppose."

"What's wrong with that?"

Trebe shook his head. "Nothing now, I guess. I doubt if he'll live long enough to give back anyway, even if we could. Inject him, then put him in the closet and make sure he's securely tied. I don't want anyone finding him accidentally. I'm going to see what I can find out. I'll be back later."



The technicians looked up in surprise when Nogura, followed by Spock and McCoy came pounding into the scanning lab, closely pursued by the Surgeon General and Greg O'Connor, head of the medical complex at Starfleet Headquarters.

"Rogers," puffed O'Connor, "pull all recent history of Admiral James Kirk and set up an immediate medical scan for same."

"Yes, sir." The young technician might have been startled at their arrival but he was all business once he had been given orders, a happening that impressed Nogura.

Minutes ticked by like hours as Rogers and his team set up the necessary equipment. Silence screamed out at the computers started collecting the required data.

"Got him, sir!" Rogers' voice broke into the stillness as his eyes remained glued to the computer readouts. O'Connor activated an auxiliary computer that would give out the same information, but flashed on a large viewscreen, not the private scanner that Rogers was using.

Kirk was alive, but it was obvious that he was far from all right. The monitoring system showed he was in a highly agitated state, both his body and mind being highly stimulated by something. Rogers and his technicians worked feverishly on the incoming data, and they all paled when the results finally correlated.

"Herrash," said McCoy in a choked whisper. "My God, he's taken herrash!"

For a moment Spock stood in frozen silence, then he turned to McCoy. "He has not taken it, Doctor. Someone else has given it to him."

Nogura looked at them both and started to say something when Rogers' voice interrupted him. "We've lost the signal!"

Instantly O'Connor was at his side. "How? What happened?"

"Is he dead?" came Nogura's voice.

Rogers shook his head. "I don't think so, sir. The symptoms he was exhibiting were not violent enough to have caused death, at least not yet. That was not withdrawal he was experiencing, that was a full high - herrash at its maximum dose in a body that was accommodating the chemical..."

"Meaning that wasn't the first time that Kirk has been exposed to it," interrupted Nogura grimly.

"Meaning that he's been missing long enough now for someone to be able to have given him six or eight shots, Admiral," broke in McCoy angrily. "Full strength, any Human would be starting to become addicted by now!"

Rogers looked from one to the other, then his eyes fell on Spock, mutely appealing for help.

"You do not feel he is dead," said Spock quietly.

"No, sir," said Rogers gratefully. "More likely someone has taken his tunic off and the belt scanner has been destroyed."

"Which means that whoever has him is at least somewhat familiar with Starfleet," said Spock thoughtfully.

"But who?" asked O'Connor, "and what reason would they have to risk bringing the power of Starfleet down on them?"

Only silence answered him. No one had an answer to the senseless riddle.



*K*irk was experiencing his first high from the herrash as Trebe came bursting into the room and jerked open the closet door. Kirk was lying on his side talking quietly to himself and giggling at his own words.

"Tandy!" yelled Trebe. "Get him untied - fast!" He was already dragging Kirk out of the small closet when Tandy reached him and ripped the wire forcefully from Kirk's wrists and ankles.

"Ouch!" Kirk made an attempt to focus his eyes on Tandy. "That wasn't nice...hurt little handies." He giggled again.

"Quick, strip off his clothes!"

"What?" Tandy stared at Trebe.

"That belt - it's a scanner. I was a blasted fool not to realize it sooner. If Starfleet locks onto that, we would be in bigger trouble than we are already. Quick, man, don't just stand there gaping!"

Within seconds they had stripped Kirk completely and Tandy did a thorough body search while Trebe destroyed the scanner.

"Rub a dub dub," murmured Kirk happily as Tandy's hands searched for anything unusual. "Wanna rubber duckie," he said as he was pulled to his feet. He looked at Trebe. "Bath time," he announced solemnly. "Can't go to bed like this."

"How much of that stuff have you given him now, Tandy?" asked Trebe as he looked at the numerous ulcerated sores on Kirk's arms and legs.

"Don't know. He keeps struggling..."

Trebe nodded. "I'd cut back a bit. He's going to blow apart soon if you stoke him up much more."

"But the withdrawal...?"

"Is more preferable. We may have to destroy him, Tandy, It could well be his life versus ours. Bind him and gag him again, then lock him in the closet. If he starts yelling, I don't want anyone to hear him."



Spock and McCoy were standing at attention in Nogura's office. The Admiral had not asked them to sit and had been staring at the two of them for the past several minutes without speaking.

Finally he turned away and got some brandy out, pouring a glass for himself. "The technicians have been told not to talk..." He downed the brandy, then turned back to the two officers, his eyes boring into Spock. "You said earlier, Commander, that you felt someone else had given herrash to Admiral Kirk. Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, sir," said Spock with quiet conviction.

"Doctor," said Nogura, looking at McCoy, "isn't it possible that Kirk has done this to himself? He's been very depressed in recent months ...not at all the man we knew. Just last night he more or less told me to shove it..."

McCoy's face flushed as Nogura spoke. "The pot should never call the kettle black, Admiral. Anything Jim went through was a direct cause of your actions..."

"That is not what I asked, Doctor," said Nogura sharply, but unconsciously he appreciated McCoy's willingness to stand up to him, just as Kirk was ready to go against his wishes, his orders. It was no wonder the Enterprise had been the ship she had been with these men. He brought his mind back to the present. "These screenings show Kirk is taking or has taken herrash. I am asking you if you think Kirk is capable of such a self-destructive and drastic action?"

For a moment McCoy thought of the hesitant, unsure man he had first seen aboard the new Enterprise. Kirk's state of mind and obvious depression then might have allowed him to toy with the idea of the relief that herrash might have brought him. But the man who had faced V'ger never would have. That James Kirk would never destroy himself. McCoy looked at Nogura. "No, sir, I don't believe he would be."

"You hesitated, Doctor," said Nogura quietly. "Your eyes told me that you did indeed believe that Kirk might be capable of such an act." McCoy was fully aware of the daggers aimed at him from Spock.

Damn it, Spock he thought, I can't be poker faced all the time like you are. And Nogura's right, I did hesitate.

"Gentlemen," said Nogura quietly, "I don't know if you really appreciate the gravity of the situation. Kirk is still officially Head of Operations. That means he has top security throughout Starfleet. He possibly knows more about this organization than any other man alive, excluding myself. Now he is missing and from what little we have been able to ascertain, quite likely is no longer rational. Whether or not he took the drug himself is really no longer the issue. He knows too much. If he falls into the wrong hands we can kiss this organization goodbye..."

"Kirk would never break!" broke in McCoy angrily.

"He'll do anything someone asks if they withdraw that drug, Doctor," said Nogura in an icy voice. "We both know that. He's Human and he has his breaking point. We all do. I will not have him jeopardize the Fleet..."

"Meaning what, Admiral?" Spock's voice was the coldest sound Nogura had ever heard.

"Meaning Starfleet comes first, Commander. We have to find him."

"I will..."

"No, you won't!" Nogura's voice held a quiet menace. "You and Dr. McCoy are confined to base."

"Admiral," continued Spock, the coldness now in his eyes as well as in his voice, "we must return to Kirk's home. That is where he will expect us to be. If he is in any condition to send a message, that is where he will send it."

"I will have the house manned by Security personnel around the clock, Commander," said Nogura. "I have some idea of what happens when the two of you take matters into your own hands and I will not tolerate your interference here. Kirk is dangerous enough to lose. You, Spock, hold an A7 computer rating and McCoy is one of our top surgeons and scientists. I do not know where Kirk is or who might be holding him, but I'll be damned if I'll let them grab all three of you!" He pressed the intercom on his desk. The door slid open to reveal a security detail. "You will

accompany these gentlemen to your quarters immediately, where they will remain on constant guard. I do not suggest you try anything..."

There was nothing more to say. Nogura's expression told them he had given them all the warning he was going to. Silently Spock and McCoy left the room and were taken to their new quarters, virtual prisoners themselves and unable to help Kirk in any way.



The hours passed into days. Kirk lost track of the time they left him in his dark hole, stripped naked and vulnerable to their every whim.

He spent long hours withdrawing from the drug, his body screaming for the blessed injection, the blessed relief from the torment.

Tandy now used him as a plaything. He knew from what Trebe had said that Kirk would not be given back alive. It no longer mattered what Tandy did to him, except to make sure the withdrawal periods grew longer and longer.

The strong man who had first stood defiantly in front of him was gone, replaced by a creature who would do anything, say anything that Tandy wished in desperate hope that the alien might give him a shot. And Tandy toyed with him, teaching Kirk an intricate pattern which he had to go through in order to be rewarded by the drug, or, as often as not, dragged fighting and crying back to the darkness of the closet to continue his battle with the horrors of withdrawal. Kirk was not aware of the degradation, he only knew he had to do what he was ordered. Wasn't that what he had been doing all his life, obeying orders? His tortured mind saw no difference. It was just another set of orders from a different authority.

He no longer acted like the civilized being they had first captured. They had reduced him to less than an animal. Most of the time he was left in blackness, gagged and tied so he could not beg, could do nothing to relieve his agony.

When he was allowed brief minutes of freedom they let him crawl on his belly, begging in any way they required him to for the one thing that would relieve his dreadful agony, to beg for the chemical which would give him a brief respite from the raging madness of withdrawal, for the chemical that was destroying his life.

Large sores surrounded all the easily accessible veins on his arms and legs but he scarcely noticed when Tandy injected the drug through the painful ulcers, often putting more herrash directly into the muscle, causing more swelling and burned flesh. Each time Tandy used the same syringe, the same dirty needle, but Kirk had stopped his struggling. Each time he saw it poised he would remain deathly still, praying that this time the needle would be injected. There was no more resistance. His fight had ended.



McCoy felt he had been pacing for hours and was sure he had worn a groove in the tile floor. During that time Spock had sat silent, never once glancing up at the restless Human, seemingly unaware that McCoy was there at all.

It had been five days since they had been 'escorted' to their temporary quarters and they had not been outside since. A hundred times a day Spock would test the one door, but each time it was locked. They were on the top floor of the Officer's Barracks with a straight, certain fatal drop to the ground far below. Their options for escape were nil. They were there until Nogura decided otherwise.

McCoy's hand smashing down on the table caused Spock to glance up at him. "Damn it, Spock, it's been five days now and apparently Security hasn't found a trace of Jim!" He turned and started pacing again. "That monitor showed Jim's system was completely dominated by herrash. Humans can't stand the constant punishment of that drug. Jim's strong, but he's not that strong. God, if he's dead...!" McCoy's voice broke. He leaned against the wall, his forehead resting on the back of his hand. "If he died from that...! Spock, if we've failed him..."

"He is alive, Doctor," said Spock quietly. "I would have felt something if he had died."

McCoy wiped tears from his eyes as he turned to look at Spock. "I can't just sit here like this, Spock..."

"Nor can I," said Spock as he slowly got to his feet.

McCoy looked at him. He knew Spock had neither eaten nor slept since they had been locked in this 'prison.' He had done little better himself and knew how exhausted he felt. He also knew that Spock would feel nothing but building rage until he found Kirk. He had seen the Vulcan wound up like this too many times before.

"Then let's call Nogura..."

"No, Doctor. He must not suspect anything and you are in no condition to go anywhere. I shall search for the Captain..."

"And just how do you propose getting out of here?" asked McCoy drily. "That's not exactly an honor guard outside our door."

"There are only two men left," said Spock. "I would presume that Nogura has every able bodied man out searching for the Captain. He is very worried about the security risk..."

"Damn his security risk!" said McCoy viciously. "We're discussing a life!"

"You do not become Commanding Admiral of Starfleet Commanby by worrying about one life," said Spock flatly.

"Then I'll never make it," said McCoy.

A small smile touched the corners of Spock's mouth. "I have the same reservations about myself," he said.

McCoy smiled, appreciating Spock's attempt at quiet humor, then sobered. "Spock, you don't even know where to start looking, and Nogura specifically ordered..."

"Doctor, at the moment Jim is alive and somewhere in this city. His presence is strong in my mind. It is imperative I reach him as soon as possible. I do not suggest you try to stop me, and I warn you against contacting Nogura concerning my actions." He looked at McCoy for a moment, then turned and walked into his bedroom. For a moment McCoy stood in stunned silence, then hurried after the Vulcan.

"Blast it, Spock," he spluttered, "you know me better than that! Besides, I'm coming with you." He watched as Spock pulled the dark sweater over his head and straightened up, but didn't give him a chance to interrupt. "I've lost Jim," he muttered. "I don't want to lose both of you. Besides, you'll probably need a doctor." He grinned a little. "Do you know of many scrapes either of you have been in where you haven't needed me pounding to the rescue?"

"It might be dangerous," said Spock.

"Or Jim might truly have lost his mind."

"You don't believe that any more than I do," said Spock quietly. "However, I appreciate your company."

"Fine, I'm glad that's settled," said McCoy firmly. "Uh, how do we get out of here?"

"That should pose little difficulty, Doctor. Please dress in the darkest, oldest clothes you have here, and bring a medical kit if you have one."

"Right," said McCoy, feeling a spark of hope. At least now maybe they could do something. If they could just get of here they might be able to find Kirk. And if anyone had a chance of finding him, it was Spock.



They pulled Kirk out of his prison for the last time. His body was bloody and filthy, his hair matted and tangled. He had been in withdrawal for a long time. They ignored his sobbing pleas, pleas that stripped him of any dignity he might have once had.

Trebe was with the others. It had taken him four days to discover the information he needed. It had given Tandy four days to work his destruction on Kirk. They forced Kirk into a chair and tied him tightly, knowing that if he managed to get loose, he would be very dangerous, desperate for the relief that herrash would give his screaming body, the herrash Tandy had been denying him.

"It appears that what you told us is the truth," said Trebe. "You apparently don't know who we are. But what was a man such as you doing in this part of the city?"

The gag had been removed from Kirk's mouth, but only soft animal sounds emerged, cries for mercy, cries for help, for relief.

A small smile crossed Trebe's face. "You have broken, Kirk. Think of it - the legend of Starfleet has been destroyed..." He reached down and pulled Kirk's head back, his hand holding the matted hair. Empty, dull eyes met his, the herrash seemingly having destroyed the vital intelligence that had made the man.

"Please...need...please...!"

Trebe nodded towards Tandy. "You'll have to ask him, Kirk. He's the drug man here. But if he decides to let you have some, savour it. It will be the last you will get. We're leaving Earth and leaving you behind. You will never remember who we are - what we look like. Your brain will never again function as it once did." He stood looking at Kirk for a minute, then turned and left the room.

Eventually only Tandy was left. He stood waving the syringe in front of Kirk's face. "Do you want some, Human?"

Dumbly Kirk nodded, open, naked longing on his face.

"Then you know what you have to do," said Tandy with a laugh. "You must show me everything you have learned to say please. If I untie you and you don't, then I'll smash this syringe, and it is the only shot left."

"No!" said Kirk in horror. "No, I'll...I'll do it...anything!"

Slowly Tandy untied Kirk, teasing him unmercifully, pretending to drop the syringe, to lose the needle. A dirty hand reached out as a whimper escaped Kirk's lips. He was so close. He would sell his soul for the relief that syringe held.

"Beg!"

Kirk begged. He was on his knees begging, then forced one step at a time to go through all the gruesome contortions that Tandy had forced him to learn. Finally he was crawling on his belly, still begging. Eventually Tandy gave him a shot in his ulcerated arm, not caring if any of the drug actually entered the vein. Then he wired Kirk's wrists and ankles together and stuffed the gag back into his mouth. He dragged Kirk to the closet and dumped him onto his side. Then the door shut and locked and Kirk was left to die slowly in his madness.



Spock and McCoy were sitting in exhausted silence in a small, dirty bar. They had been on the move for hours, carefully avoiding contact with any small groups of people. They had no way of knowing who might be

from Starfleet security or who might even be the people who had taken Kirk and might, as Nogura had suggested, be looking for them.

McCoy took a deep swallow of his drink and grimaced as it hit his empty stomach. Spock had not touched his and McCoy knew he wouldn't. He had purchased it merely for show, and not to arouse any suspicions that might cause someone to remember that they had been there. McCoy picked up a stale nutriment stick from a bowl on the table and chewed it unenthusiastically. He couldn't afford to get drunk. Not now, not with so much at stake.

He glanced at Spock, worried about the slight glimpses of desperation the Vulcan had been showing. Maybe he should try talking, distract him for a few minutes. Spock had to relax a little or he was going to blow apart.

"Spock," he said quietly.

Dark eyes glanced up at him.

"Do you mind explaining to me now how we got out of Fleet Headquarters? Although I am aware of the fact that we merely walked out of our rooms and down the executive elevator, I still suspect your hand in there somewhere."

For a moment Spock looked at him, then dropped his eyes. The silence drew out and McCoy decided Spock wasn't going to answer.

"That's right, Spock!" he said, his anger rising. "Keep treating me like a fool you were forced to bring along and who keeps hampering your rescue attempts. As a matter of fact, you'd probably be just as happy if I was still back researching Fabrini medicine...!"

Spock looked up again, this time letting some of his exhaustion and worry show. "Not at all, Doctor. You might possibly be the only person who can save Jim..."

McCoy couldn't remember hearing such a sound of near defeat in Spock's voice before. Instantly he was sorry he had lost his temper. "Spock, I..."

"It's all right, Doctor. We have been in this kind of situation before. Harsh words seem to be part of the ritual." He took a deep breath. "As far as anyone knows, we are still being held at Starfleet. You will recall that there was only one guard when we left. I suggested to him that he had momentarily fallen asleep. When he checks, he will hear your voice saying that I am meditating and you are going to bed. He will want to believe that so he will not ask questions. And, as he will find the door still locked from the outside, there will be nothing to arouse his suspicions. Anyone contacting us will receive an appropriate answer from the viewscreen computer..."

"And I thought you had been sitting around for five days," said McCoy. "I should have known better."

"Have you rested sufficiently?" asked Spock, quickly changing the subject. "If so, I think we had best be on our way." Together they walked out into the dark night, not knowing where they were headed, but determined to find Kirk.

They had been walking for hours along the narrow, dimly lighted streets. Spock moved slowly, never once breaking his concentration, his mind always reaching out, searching for some trace of the familiar contact of Kirk's mind. He knew that Kirk was still alive, maybe terribly hurt, but alive, refusing the sentence of death that the demanding drug would be calling for.

McCoy was keeping up by dogged determination. He was too tired to care how long they had been walking, and he didn't dare think about how much further they would be going.

Suddenly Spock cried out in agony, clutching at his head as he staggered a few steps forward before collapsing onto his knees. Instantly McCoy's exhaustion was forgotten as he pulled out his scanner.

"Spock, what is it?" The scanner showed a tremendous variation in Spock's brain wave activity - cause unknown. McCoy put his hands on Spock's shoulders and shook him hard. "Spock, come on, snap out of it!"

His sharp voice seemed to break through. Spock looked numbly up at him, then slowly got to his feet. "I am all right, Doctor, thank you."

"What the blazes happened...?"

But Spock was no longer listening. His mind had turned inward and he stood motionless, his eyes unfocused. "I am being...bombarded...pain..." He visibly straightened. "I have found Jim, Doctor."

"What? How...?"

But Spock was already running forward, his quick strides forcing McCoy to sprint after him. McCoy made no attempt to distract the Vulcan. Spock obviously knew where he was going.

The locked door shattered under the strength of Spock's shoulder, and they burst into the deserted room. McCoy looked around.

"What are you up to, Spock? There isn't anybody here..."

Spock paid no attention to him. He walked across the room and practically unhinged another door as he pulled it open. The lock groaned and then splintered.

"Doctor...!" Spock's voice broke off and he stood frozen.

McCoy dashed across the room and dropped to his knees. "Oh, my God!" he breathed.

Kirk was thrashing against an unseen horror, his eyes open and staring, but seeing only the terror in his mind, that same terror that

had only minutes before driven Spock to his knees as the confusion of Kirk's torment filtered into the Vulcan's empathic mind. Wire cord was embedded in the flesh of Kirk's wrists and ankles, buried deeply by his constant struggles. Large, suppurating sores covered his arms and legs.

McCoy pulled out his hypo and injected as much tranquilizer as he dared. Gently Spock removed the gag, then loosened the wire, biting his lip as he was forced to pull it from Kirk's flesh. Carefully he lifted Kirk from where he lay and brought him out into the main room.

McCoy swallowed hard as he read the medical tricorder. Herrash addiction and forced withdrawal, and all the physical and mental breakdowns that came with both. Grimly he brought out his hypo and dialed it.

"What are you giving him?"

McCoy glanced at Spock. "You know without asking. Someone has addicted his system to herrash and now he's in acute withdrawal. If he doesn't get more, he's going to be dead and I don't have any proper support medication that I can use as a substitute.

"Is it really necessary?"

"Look for yourself." McCoy handed him the tricorder. "Both his mind and body are being dangerously overtaxed by deprivation and hallucinations. His heart rate is practically off the scale. He's dehydrated. He's suffering from almost non-stop cramping and dry heaves. Heaven only knows when they started but they're going to continue until I can get him on the proper drugs." His voice softened. "One more shot isn't going to make that much difference."

Spock remained kneeling beside Kirk, his strong arms still wrapped around the now feebly struggling Human. Pain showed deep in his eyes but he said nothing. McCoy pressed the hypo against Kirk's neck, his eyes grimly noting the ulcerated sores that almost totally covered Kirk's arms and legs. *They would hurt like hell, he thought to himself, if Jim was still capable of feeling anything. Maybe in a way it's just as well that he's so out of it.*

The tricorder ran noiselessly until McCoy was satisfied that the drug was taking effect and some of Kirk's agitation was abating. Slowly he sat down on the floor, his knees violently protesting the length of time he had remained kneeling on the hard wood. Spock did not move from where he knelt, his arms wrapped around Kirk's upper body.

McCoy looked at Spock. "We're going to have to contact Starfleet. He's in bad shape..."

"No."

"What do you mean, no?"

"Think Doctor. What will Starfleet do if they receive him in this condition?"

"I don't know. Rehabilitation..."



"Exactly, and if he is not already destroyed, that will do it. I will not allow that to happen."

"Spock, it may already be too late."

"He is not going to be institutionalized. If he is unable to return to the man he was, I will take him home to Vulcan. I did not come back to be in Starfleet, I returned to be at his side, to be with him."

"What are you suggesting, Spock?"

Silently Spock shifted his position so he was also sitting on the floor with Kirk lying between his open legs, the Human's back resting against his chest, the now lolling head back against the Vulcan's shoulder. Gently Spock moved the sweat drenched hair off Kirk's forehead, then again hugged him firmly. Finally he looked at McCoy. "I want you to treat him. Starfleet isn't to know."

"What? Spock, you're insane! Look at him! He needs to go to an advanced medical facility and even there it might not be enough..."

"What would you need to treat him?" Spock's stubborn eyes showed he wasn't through arguing.

McCoy looked at him, then at Kirk's now limp body, the herrash having taken him to a place none of them could follow, taken him to a deadly haven in the middle of madness.

"Well, to start with I'd need a hospital facility of some kind that had monitoring equipment, respirators, that kind of thing. Then I'd need free access to a large number of drugs, no questions asked. He's going to need IV's, protein nutrients, tranquilizers, heart support medication, synthetic support drugs to replace the herrash... Spock, I can't...!"

"Doctor, no one knows Kirk better than you do. No one has a better chance of pulling him through. Think! There is a very good possibility that if we take him back to Starfleet that they won't let you anywhere near him. We've disobeyed direct orders from Admiral Nogura and you have already seen what his reaction is to life over institution."

McCoy looked back at Kirk, obviously wavering.

"I have complete faith in you and in your ability, McCoy," said Spock quietly, "and he deserves everything we can do for him. He didn't ask for this to happen. Would you desert him now?"

McCoy sighed quietly. He felt a stab of pride at Spock's words even though he realized it was a polished snow job. The Vulcan very rarely acknowledged McCoy's importance in Kirk's life and now he had practically underlined the necessity of his presence. Yet he was also afraid. Kirk was a very sick man and he was only going to get sicker. A Human could live several years on controlled doses of herrash but not after severe withdrawal. The body was left too weak and damaged. They could no longer fight the terrible depletion of withdrawal, and their system was no longer strong enough to cope with the powerful chemical reaction of the herrash. In either case, they died.

"I could kill him, Spock. Do you think I could live with that?"

"Could you live with the knowledge of his death when you had no chance to help?"

Again McCoy fell silent. Spock knew he was very close to a decision. Then he felt Kirk start to shift in his arms.

"Doctor!"

Kirk jerked up out of Spock's hold, a horrible scream forced from his throat. He fell sideways, his body doubling up in pain. Instantly McCoy was at his side, pumping in muscle relaxants and tranquilizers. Finally Kirk lay still, dry heaves gradually relaxing their grip as the cramps slowly died away.

"The herrash didn't help much," said Spock quietly, almost accusingly.

McCoy swallowed hard. "I hate to think how much of that stuff they were pumping into him. I gave him a pretty big shot..." He got up and for a long time stood looking at what was left of the strong man he had known, torn by what he personally wanted to do and what medically he knew he should do.

Finally he looked around. "Are his clothes here, or a blanket, or something we can wrap him up in?" After searching around, he found Kirk's clothes, torn and filthy, stuffed in the back of the closet where he had been imprisoned. "We can't put these on him," he said quietly. Further search brought a thin, tattered blanket, but it was better than nothing. Together they wrapped Kirk firmly, McCoy positioning Kirk's arms so they were trapped in the folds of the blanket. "That will make him easier to hold if he starts hallucinating again." Together they carried Kirk to an old, sagging bed in the corner of the room. "Spock, stay with him. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Spock's eyebrow rose in question.

"I've got an idea," said McCoy. "It's time I collected a few favors." After a last worried look at Kirk, McCoy left.

Spock sat on the side of the bed, his hand gently brushing across Kirk's forehead, trying to let the Human know that someone was with him. But Kirk kept moving restlessly, his mind gripped by the horrors of the chemical and the raging needs of his body.

"It's all right, Jim," he said, not having any idea if Kirk could hear him or understand what he was saying. "McCoy's gone to get help."

Kirk grew steadily worse. Finally Spock was forced to firmly hold him down onto the bed. He injected some more of the tranquilizers that McCoy had left, but they seemed to be doing little good.

"There must be some way of getting through to you," said Spock as he fought with the Human. Finally, in desperation, he grabbed Kirk's face, his fingers spreading quickly to the familiar entry points of the meld.

Kirk fought wildly against the invasion, but the carefully wrapped blanket hampered his movements. Suddenly he fell limp and totally passive, leaving Spock no further resistance as his mind reached into the familiar passages of Kirk's mind.

He found no rational thought - no sanity met his probing, no essence of the man he had known as James Kirk met the meld. Kirk's mind was seemingly destroyed by the powerful narcotic, his mind destroyed for a reason none of them could understand.

Steeling himself, Spock probed deeper, past the layers of unconscious thought that was now only a blurred mass of need. He pushed through chaotic layers of confusion, desperately looking for a spark of life, and finding none.

For long moments he rested, trying to gain strength to probe deeper, to find some trace of sanity among the churning madness.

The whirling lights of insanity were all he found. There were no memories, nothing to grasp onto to bring the man back to himself. Again he thought of nothing, his mind reeling, trying to confront the destruction he was meeting.

Suddenly he realized that he had to get out. Kirk's insanity was rising up to claim him, threatening to overwhelm him. If he stayed any longer he would be pulled forever into Kirk's madness. He had already stayed too long. He didn't have time to build safeguards as he withdrew. With a loud cry, he ripped his mind free of the jumbled chaos and collapsed backwards onto the floor.

From far away he felt something press against his arm and almost instantly he felt sharp needles stinging through his system. Immediately a churning nausea hit his stomach and he knew that McCoy was back and had injected him with something.

He groaned and tried to sit up. Instantly McCoy moved to support him. "Take it easy, Spock. Don't exert yourself."

Spock opened his eyes. "Jim?"

"He's all right," said McCoy quickly, reassured by Spock's question that the Vulcan had suffered no harm. "Now, what the hell were you trying to do, kill yourself?"

Spock finally got into a sitting position. "He was so scared, so desperate. I tried to let him know I was here."

"Well," said McCoy gruffly, "at least you had the sense to pull out of it. I was almost ready to knock you out."

"You saw?"

McCoy nodded. "You had just started the meld when I walked in. Blast it, Spock, any fool would have known the dangers of entering that kind of a mind! I've already told you once today that I don't want

to lose both of you..." He swallowed hard. When he had first said that Kirk had still been missing and he had held the illogical Human reaction of hope. Now he had only the horror of reality - he might yet lose one of them. "I still mean it," he finished lamely, knowing he had revealed too much by his words.

Slowly Spock got to his feet. "You said something about collecting favors earlier, Doctor."

McCoy frowned. Spock was refusing to accept the gravity of the situation, but now was not the time to argue about it. "There's an ambulance on its way. I've arranged to have Jim taken to a private clinic outside the city. They've got everything there that we will need, and there will be no questions asked."

"Is it..."

"Spock, it's run by an old friend. When I explain to him what we're doing, he won't question. He's the original maverick. Anything that bucks authority has his full support." He turned back to Kirk who was starting to move restlessly again. "Mike's sending some support medication with the ambulance. I don't dare give Jim any more herrash, not the amount he obviously needs." He hesitated for a moment. "What sick, destructive people could have done this, to deliberately destroy a man in this fashion?"

"We will probably never know," said Spock quietly. "Jim has no memory of what happened, and I doubt if he ever will have. It will remain a blank forever. Whoever held him could hardly not have realized who he was. They are probably long gone from this city, possibly even from Earth itself. Escape would be simple. No one in authority knows who they are looking for, who to stop."

They were interrupted by the sound of an approaching airvan. McCoy moved quickly to the window and looked out. "It's the ambulance," he said with relief. "Wait here, I'll be right back." He thundered off down the stairs and a few seconds later Spock heard the ambulance start up again and leave. McCoy came back up the stairs two at a time, a small package in his hands.

"Told you we didn't have anything to worry about, Spock. I obviously got through to Mike even though I didn't say much. That van was sent as a decoy, just in case anyone was following. Mike's coming himself with another one and he's going to make sure he's not being followed." He put the package down. "Support drugs. At least we will have a fighting chance until Mike gets here!"

It was another half hour before a nondescript van pulled up in front of the dilapidated house. By then Kirk was quiet, the drugs blocking the worst of the hallucinations, taking the worst edge off the craving induced by his withdrawal.

A tall, burly man with a flowing red beard came up the stairs, a portable gurney under his arm. "Sorry I was so long, Len, but you sounded serious about keeping this quiet. What's up?" His eyes fell on Kirk's prone figure, then he glanced at Spock before he looked back at McCoy.

"I'll tell you on the way to the clinic, Mike," said McCoy. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate this."

"No problem," said Mike cheerfully. "I take it my driver made it."

McCoy nodded. "Not a moment too soon. We sure needed those drugs." He moved to the bed and with Spock's help, got Kirk transferred to the gurney. They took off the blanket, Spock fully expecting some comment from McCoy's friend on Kirk's condition, but none came. Kirk was efficiently wrapped in a soft blanket and strapped securely to the stretcher.

"All right, gentlemen," said Mike. "Shall we be off?"

Spock and Mike carried the gurney down to the waiting van. McCoy climbed into the back with Kirk, and Spock sat up front. On the way to the clinic, McCoy introduced the Vulcan and filled Mike in on what little they knew about what had happened.



The small suite of rooms was set out at the back of the clinic, isolated and soundproof. Here the battle for Kirk's life would be fought. Kirk probably had three days of life left at most before exhaustion would make him succumb to the tremendous demands of his body. They had three days to successfully complete the withdrawal.

Somehow they had to give Kirk enough supportive therapy to keep him going, and they were already fighting a losing battle. Kirk had been in withdrawal for a long time before they had found him - that meant hours of hallucinations, violent cramping, vomiting - all of which had drained him tremendously, maybe too much.

McCoy was just finishing tying the last strap of the soft harness when Spock came in. The Vulcan had gone with Mike to find out the latest news from Starfleet. Mike had friends in high places and could find out things that the Starfleet officers in their present situation could not.

"What's going on, Spock?"

"Security is still looking, Doctor, but apparently Admiral Nogura has convinced himself that Captain Kirk has indeed turned suicidal and taken his own life."

"Ha!" snorted McCoy, "that shows how much time he has taken to read Jim's profile tapes."

"How is he, Doctor?" asked Spock quietly.

"Not good," said McCoy, knowing he had to be honest. "I've treated all these damned ulcerated sores and started sonic treatments to heal the internal damage in the muscle tissue. I'd love to get my hands on that demented idiot who did this to him...!"

"Is that harness necessary?" asked Spock as he looked at Kirk, soft cloth wrapped around the lean body, holding Kirk's arms firm and strapping his body to the bed.

"It's for his own safety, Spock. You've seen how weak he is, how bad what little coordination he has left is. I don't want him to hurt himself..."

"What else?"

McCoy frowned. "Well, he's dehydrated. I've set up an IV, but I don't know how long the vein is going to hold out. I've only been able to find two that are much good, one in his foot, another on the back of his hand. Everything else is collapsed or so badly ulcerated that I hesitate trying to shove a needle through."

Spock nodded slowly, his eyes taking in the slow drip from the tubing that disappeared into Kirk's body.

McCoy glanced at the stockpile of drugs on the table across the room. "I've got everything I need to treat him except the two things I need most."

"Which are?"

"Strength and time," McCoy said quietly. "We're going to be fighting hallucinations, continuing dry vomiting and debilitating cramps and, worst of all, exhaustion. He won't be able to sleep and nothing we can give him will make him sleep. He's going to be fighting horrors we can't even begin to imagine, and he's not going to be able to escape them."

"Perhaps I could..."

"Don't you dare!" retorted McCoy. "You almost killed yourself once and what did it accomplish?" He smiled a little. "I'm sorry, Spock, I didn't mean to yell at you." He looked back at Kirk. "Most Humans don't die from the withdrawal, they literally die of exhaustion. The herrash addiction can be beaten but most don't possess the strength. You've seen the tremendous spasms that keep shaking Jim, almost convulsions at times. It places a tremendous strain on the heart, and the terror lived in his mind doesn't help. He's starting out down, and that's the only direction he's going to go. It will take nothing short of a miracle to pull him through."

Spock looked down at Kirk. "You are a doctor, McCoy. You can treat his body, give it the support it will need..."

"Or maybe I'll just subject him to the worst of hells before he dies."

A cold fear went through Spock at McCoy's words. The Human was revealing feelings Spock had been scared were there. McCoy was very close to Kirk, maybe too close to be able to treat him effectively, to stand the amount of suffering that Kirk was going to have to undergo. Had he made a mistake? Firmly he shook himself. "He will not die," said Spock quietly. "I am going to wash and change, then I shall be back to relieve you so you can run those tests you mentioned earlier."

"Spock," McCoy's voice stopped the Vulcan in mid-turn, "are you sure we're doing the right thing?"

Slowly Spock turned back. "Doctor, which do you think he would accept - life as he knows it can be, or remaining the prisoner of a chemical that will eventually destroy him. He is not a man who gives up, but would you not agree that death is an acceptable alternative here? After one last glance at Kirk, Spock turned and left the room.

For a long time McCoy stood in silence by the bed, then he sighed. *And what if you have broken?* he thought to himself. *I have seen what herrash can do. I have seen men who were reduced to less than animals. Was that done to you, Jim? If your mind has not been utterly destroyed, will that memory allow you to again be the man you were? I wonder if Spock truly recognizes the hell he has chosen for you - the hell I have assented to letting you face by agreeing to bring you here when I don't honestly know if I can do what is necessary to save you, to save your sanity...*

He looked at Kirk's open, yet unseeing eyes. He winced at the occasional whimper that escaped Kirk's lips, his chest heaving slightly as his body cried out for the blessed relief of the drug, relief that the support medication could not fully provide. McCoy set up another IV and started a solution of soluble protein nutriments. He checked the other IV which contained fluids and electrolytes. It was still properly adjusted. Within minutes Spock was back and McCoy was on his way to finish the blood tests that Mike had started for him earlier.



Kirk's screams filled the small room and his body was soaked with sweat as he fought against the soft restraints. Spock pushed Kirk's shoulders tightly against the bed, riding out the worst of the storm, unable to leave him long enough to contact McCoy. The room's soundproofing would not let the sounds filter past the walls.

The fight seemed to go on forever before Kirk's violent thrashing started to lessen. Gradually Spock relaxed his grip as Kirk subsided, but noted uneasily that there was still a wild look in the dull hazel eyes, eyes that had once been so full of sparkle and life.

"Jim?" Spock's hand reached out and touched Kirk's flushed face.

Kirk whimpered and briefly fought the restraints that held him. He tried to speak but nothing intelligible came out.

"What is it, Jim?" asked Spock quietly. "Is there something you want?" Instinctively his hand moved to the entry points for the meld. There must be some way of breaking through.

Again only the blind whirl of need and madness met his brief probe. Almost instantly Spock pulled free, his face pale from the shock of meeting such unleashed emotion.

"What the hell?" McCoy's voice came from a great distance away. "Spock, what's happened? You look like you've just seen a ghost!" He grabbed his scanner and ran it over Kirk.

"Jim, he..." Spock swallowed hard. "He just had some sort of seizure. I couldn't let go of him long enough to call you."

"Damn," muttered McCoy, "his heart is going to give out if it goes much faster." He grabbed his hypo and injected a massive dose of tranquilizers and heart support medication. "Hold him still, Spock, I've got to get these IV needles reattached."

Kirk fought Spock's hold, fought McCoy as he tried to reinsert the needles. Tears ran down his face, mingling with the sweat from his long fight.

"Spock, get him a glass of water," said McCoy as he securely taped the IV tube to Kirk's leg. The Vulcan raised Kirk's head and held the cup to Kirk's lips. The Human thirstily gulped at the liquid.

"Not too fast...!" McCoy's warning was too late. Kirk's stomach rebelled as the liquid entered and great heaves shook his body.

Kirk finally lay exhausted, his body trembling from the additional abuse. Spock stood in frozen horror as McCoy finally released Kirk's head and rolled the shaking Human onto his back.

"Well, it was a good idea while it lasted. I had hoped it might help stem some of his craving." He looked at Kirk. "I was obviously wrong. Come on, we'd better get him cleaned up."

They were silent while Spock held Kirk still as McCoy washed him. They both knew that Kirk was slipping although neither was willing to voice it. After Kirk was clean, McCoy started dressing the stubborn ulcerated sores that so far didn't seem to be responding to the medication.

"I've finished the lab tests," he said as he worked. "Jim has hepatitis." He glanced up at Spock. "He got it from repeated injections with a contaminated needle."

"A contaminated needle? I don't understand..."

McCoy shook his head in disgust. "He's had herrash injected by a needle and syringe. Undoubtedly that's how all these ulcerated sores occurred. Herrash destroys muscle tissue if it comes in direct contact with it. An air pressure hypo would never cause that contact, a needle and syringe would. I thought those barbaric things were obsolete years ago, but it's obvious that someone still uses one." He finished one side and with Spock's help they rolled Kirk over in a tangle of dressings and IV tubes. "He's very sick, Spock, and he's going to get a lot worse..."

"But he will live," Spock's words were half statement, half question.

"How much can he stand?" said McCoy, his voice threatening to break. "His mind can't support him. He doesn't know where he is, he doesn't know we're here. All he knows is that he is no longer getting herrash..." McCoy roughly brushed his hand across his wet eyes, then went back to changing the dressings.

"How will the hepatitis affect him?"

McCoy took a deep breath. "In this condition? Debilitating weakness, possible liver damage, probably jaundice. It's a tough strain, one that I haven't seen for years, not since I worked in the free clinic back in Atlanta when I first started practicing. The old skid row bums would have it...and most of them died."

"Surely there is a treatment for it," said Spock, unable to keep the worry out of his voice.

"Sure there is," said McCoy bitterly, "the same way as there is support medication for herrash addiction, heart support medication, tranquilizers for his seizures..."

"Then I don't understand the problem," said Spock sharply. McCoy wasn't making any sense, and he was obviously badly shaken by Kirk's seizure.

McCoy looked at him wearily. "Have you ever heard the term 'contraindicated'?" The Vulcan nodded. "Well," continued McCoy, "what Jim has come up with is a set of symptoms and complications where the normal medications working together would be certain to kill him. You can't use them together, not the most effective ones. We can't cure anything, Spock! All we can hope to do is to keep him comfortable enough to die with some dignity...!"

"McCoy!" Spock's voice was even sharper.

McCoy shook his head. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it. It's just that put down on paper, it looks so hopeless..."

"You cannot capture Jim's courage on paper, Doctor," said Spock quietly. "Why don't you try to get some sleep. I will stay with him."

"You'll call me if anything happens?"

Spock nodded. "Do not worry, you have written down every possible complication and what to do."

"All right, I guess I'm not much use to anyone in this condition anyway. I'll just take a quick nap."



McCoy slept for sixteen hours. He slept through the almost constant seizures that gripped Kirk. Spock made no effort to contact the sleeping Human. He knew that McCoy was close to breaking, finding it almost impossible to divorce his feelings for Kirk from the cold demeanor that was

necessary to successfully ignore the tremendous agony Kirk was undergoing. The less he saw, the better. The less he was around Kirk when he was out of control, the longer he would effectively be able to treat him. McCoy had said that Kirk had less than three days to live - Spock strongly suspected that McCoy had less time than that to be able to do his job effectively.

Spock held Kirk down as best he could during the most violent parts of the seizures. He replaced the IV needles that Kirk kept tearing from his arms and legs. He injected more tranquilizers as they became necessary and carefully monitored Kirk's vital signs, using support medication for both Kirk's heart and the herrash withdrawal when the monitors indicated that they were needed. He changed the IV bags as they emptied and kept a careful check on the dressings that covered the large part of Kirk's arms and legs.

Never once during those hours did Kirk relax, never once did he have more than a brief respite from the terrible raging needs of his body. But in those few precious moments of peace, those few minutes when he could relax, Spock had to endure the look in Kirk's eyes - the open, naked pleading. When he fought there was only fury and condemnation spurred on by the desperation of his need for the drug, but in those peaceful moments there was only confusion and betrayal and it was tearing at Spock's soul to see it.

Kirk had started his last seizure totally exhausted and was almost unconscious when McCoy finally made an appearance, unnoticed by Spock.

"One shot," he heard Kirk say in an exhausted, cracking voice. "God, don't do this to me!" His voice broke into a cry as he wrenched against the harness that was now thoroughly soaked with his own sweat. Spock grabbed Kirk's shoulders and held him firm against the bed. As McCoy moved to the side of the bed, Kirk was sobbing in desperation, pleading in a broken voice for the herrash, for an end of the suffering he could no longer endure.

Spock glanced up at McCoy as the doctor ran the tricorder. "How long was I asleep?"

"Sixteen hours."

"You had no right to treat him, Spock. I'm the doctor."

"There was nothing to be accomplished by waking you. I have recorded what I did, and his reactions..." He broke off as Kirk's struggles increased.

"How long has he been having seizures?"

"Almost since the time you left. Most of them die down after a short while. He has a few minutes rest before they start up again."

"A few minutes!" McCoy heard his voice rise in anger and clamped his mouth shut. Suddenly he knew why Spock had not called him. How long would he have allowed this to go on? He looked at the chart, trying to get his thoughts organized. "Has he been lucid for long?" he finally asked.

"Lucid?"

"Talking. Making sense."

Spock frowned. "I'm not sure. Off and on for most of the time. But I don't think he knows what is going on. His mind is focused solely on his own needs, his suffering. I have tried to explain to him what is happening but he doesn't appear to understand."

"What about the meld, and what's this Sadag he keeps mentioning?"

Spock looked at him sharply but didn't bother to deny that he had tried again. "Nothing," he said with finality, cutting off any more questions about either subject.

A sudden scream was torn from Kirk's throat and he ripped loose from Spock's grip, sending the Vulcan sprawling backwards onto the floor. McCoy tried to inject more tranquilizers but couldn't connect with Kirk's thrashing body. Spock finally sprawled across Kirk to hold him so McCoy could keep the hypo held still long enough to give the injection. He stayed in that position until Kirk finally subsided again and McCoy had time to reconnect the IV needles yet again.

"His mind is going to give in soon," said McCoy, not looking at Spock "He's not going to be able to take much more."

"He is still fighting. He will survive..."

Spock was startled by McCoy's hand twisting him around. "Blast you! Last week I admitted to myself that you had finally let yourself feel, but you don't feel anything! Because of your selfishness, you are causing a man you claim to love to suffer more than any man should ever be asked to do. Because of your selfishness! I never would have believed it of you, Spock, but what you are doing to Kirk now makes me sick!"

"You are a willing part of it, Doctor."

"Like hell I am!" retorted McCoy. He turned and stormed out of the room.

Spock slowly straightened his tunic as he looked down at Kirk. Was he being selfish? Was he making Kirk fight a battle that he shouldn't be asked to fight? Was he making the Human suffer so that he could live with a clear conscience? No, the fight was for Kirk who could no longer make the decision to fight. It was for Kirk's life, not for his own.



*A*s the hours passed, Kirk slipped noticeably. He was too tired to keep fighting and too desperate not to. His seizures were growing ever more violent, and it was taking most of Spock's strength to hold him, to prevent him from tearing loose. Occasionally Spock would try to reason with him, even though it was useless. Kirk never appeared to understand anything he said, only cried out for what he needed.

McCoy was becoming an increasing liability. He was at the breaking point, exhaustion and personal involvement threatening to interfere with his medical competence. Spock had stopped calling him when Kirk had a relapse. If McCoy was there, Spock would defer treatment to him, otherwise he coped with Kirk's struggles by himself, holding him until exhaustion overcame the Human and he would lie quiet for a short time.

Never once did Kirk sleep, the withdrawal would not allow the exhausted body to yield. He cried and pleaded with Spock and McCoy for relief, no longer able to think of anything except the peace the herrash would bring.

They were side by side when the latest seizure struck. Together they fought with Kirk, then McCoy reached out for the hypo. "I'm giving him herrash," he said firmly. "I won't let this keep happening. Spock, his mind has been destroyed by that drug. The spark that made him James Kirk is gone. There's nothing left to reach. He's only an empty shell, there's only want and need with no mind left to understand why. Admit it, he's lost and he's dying..."

Spock smashed the hypo from McCoy's hand. "No!"

McCoy looked back at Spock, fury infusing his face. "Spock, face it, he's being destroyed. His mind probably is already destroyed. What sense is there in making him undergo any more of this torture? He'd be better off with controlled doses and letting him die without having to undergo any more agony..."

"He survived untreated withdrawal long enough to let us find him..." Spock's voice broke as he remembered the terrible sight of Kirk lying helpless in the dark, stinking closet.

"Spock..."

"I said no!"

"Damn it, he's a human being. There's only so much that he can take, and I can stand to watch! Maybe as a Vulcan you can control that steel trap mind and deny his suffering, but I can't...!"

"Get out!"

"What...?"

Spock let go of Kirk's thrashing body and grabbed McCoy, flinging him bodily out of the room, locking the door behind him.

"Spock!" McCoy hammered on the door. "Damn you, let me in!" His banging was almost drowned out by Kirk's screams. Spock didn't have time to deal with both, and right now Kirk was more important. He would face McCoy later.



Kirk was finally quiet. He lay breathing heavily, his hair plastered against his face, almost comatose from exhaustion. Spock unlocked the door, not surprised to see McCoy sitting in the corridor outside.

"It is over, Doctor," he said quietly. He turned back into the room and walked over to Kirk, putting his hand on the harnessed arm. "Jim, listen to me. You are safe now. McCoy and I are both here. Someone has addicted you to herrash and we are trying to break that addiction. Jim, do you understand?" He had tried those same words a hundred times, hoping that somehow Kirk would hear and understand him, yet knowing each time he said it that it wasn't happening.

As before, only a brief struggle met his touch. But this time the struggle was very weak. Kirk had absolutely nothing left to fight with. He had come to the end of his strength - the end of his fight. Sighing slightly, Spock got some hot water, then unstrapped Kirk and took off the harness. He needed to be washed, the sores treated and more IV's started. Spock was getting some soap on the cloth when he heard a sickened gasp from McCoy.

He turned and froze. Kirk was no longer on the bed, but had somehow found the strength to hump himself onto the floor. Kirk's hand groped upwards. "I obey...order," he gasped. "I...beg...crawl...please, give...shot...will do...what...you want..."

In speechless horror, Spock and McCoy watched as Kirk went through the ritual he had been forced to perform each time Tandy played with him, sometimes rewarding him with the drug, other times forcing him screaming in terror back to the closet to fight the terrible cravings of withdrawal in his black hole. Kirk might be beaten by the drug but he still had enough will to try one more time. Spock felt the bile rising in his throat at the terrible degradation. It was not a man who was groveling at his feet, it was a beaten, broken animal.

With a wounded denial, Spock fell to his knees, gathering Kirk into his arms. Small, pleading cries met Spock's action, whimpers forced from a body that was desperately craving what it was being denied, and being denied for a reason it could not understand. He had done everything he was supposed to. What else did they want?

"Spock, you can't let him go on like this!" Spock looked up to see McCoy standing in the doorway, his face deathly white from shock. "Would he have done that if he had not broken? Could you conceive of any man, much less James Kirk, doing something like that if his mind had any control of his body? Spock, the support drugs aren't working. Let me give him some herrash and stop this torture!"

"No, Doctor," said Spock quietly as he lifted Kirk back onto the bed. "He's come this far. He goes all the way."

"Damn you, Spock!" snapped McCoy, "you can see what sort of hell he is being subjected to. What further hell are you going to make him undergo before he dies?"

"He will not die," said Spock as he began to wash Kirk. He glanced up at McCoy. "I would appreciate your help, Doctor," he said quietly.

With sullen anger, McCoy moved forward and helped Spock wash the exhausted man, change the soiled dressings and re-establish the IV tubes. Then he ran a scanner over Kirk, his eyes finally meeting Spock's. "Do I need to say it?" he asked quietly.

"No," said Spock. He knew the scanner showed that Kirk was dying.

"Well, I'll say it anyway..."

"Doctor, that is enough!"

For a moment they stood glaring at each other, then McCoy's eyes dropped. "I'm sorry, Spock, I know what you're going through. It's just so unnecessary..."

"Doctor," interrupted Spock, "I should like to be alone with the Captain for a short time."

McCoy's eyes darted to Spock's face. "You're not planning on doing anything foolish?"

Spock smiled slightly. "I appreciate your concern, Doctor, but rest assured my mental state is more settled than yours. No, I am not planning on doing anything foolish. I just wish to be alone." For a moment Spock hesitated as though he was going to say something more, then obviously changed his mind.

"All right," said McCoy reluctantly, "but if you run into trouble, let out a holler."

"I shall do that," replied Spock. For a moment they stood looking at each other, then McCoy turned and left.

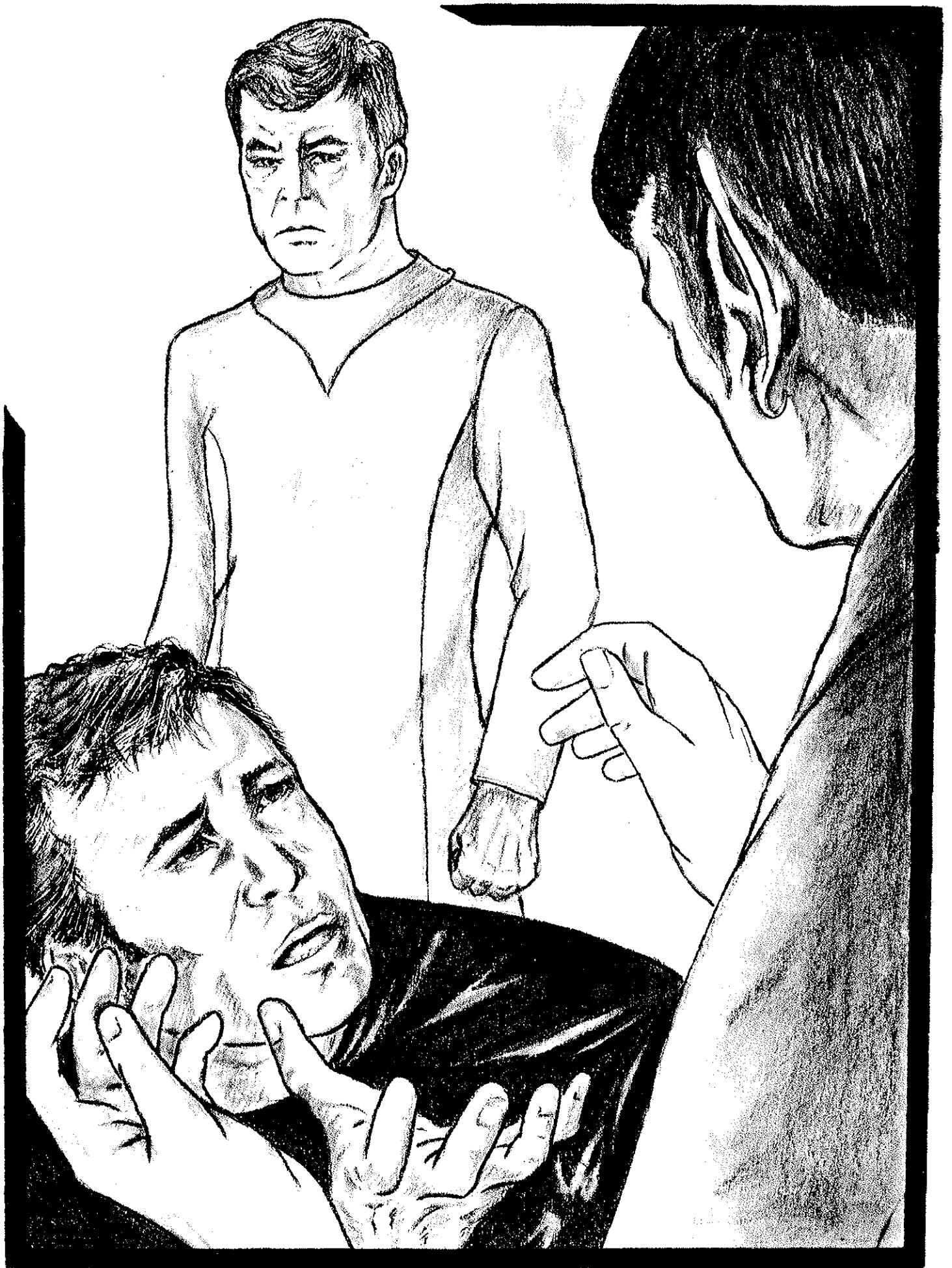


Again Spock entered the mad blackness of Kirk's mind. It was the last meld he would attempt. If this didn't work, he would let McCoy have his way and Kirk would be given controlled doses of herrash, carefully monitored and regulated until death decided to free him. He would not be forced to go through any more suffering.

This time Spock met no resistance to his probe. Kirk's exhaustion would not permit him the luxury of resistance. Spock quickly passed through Kirk's subconscious and went straight into the depths of his madness.

He paused for a minute, his mind having a difficult time trying to absorb the whirling confusion and needs of Kirk's tortured mind.

For some reason, the words of the song returned to Spock, the soulful cry of someone centuries earlier, crying out as he cried out now. And, in a dark corner of Kirk's madness, a tiny light appeared - a tiny thought formed and slowly grew to stand as a symbol.



A rose...

Cautiously Spock's thoughts reached towards it. He did nothing to call Kirk. He thought only of the song and its pleading words. Gradually the image of the rose stood clear, a solitary, fragile beacon in the midst of raging madness.

Spock stayed just long enough to assure himself of one other thing, then quietly began to withdraw. It was all he dared do. If he stayed in Kirk's mind any longer, he would be pulled forever into his madness. He hoped he had given Kirk enough to hold onto. He had given him a memory - a want and a need. Spock hoped it would prove stronger than the chemicals that controlled Kirk's body now.



The room was dark when McCoy returned. For a moment he felt panic surface. He knew that Kirk was close to total insanity, and that insanity could have overpowered Spock. Kirk was an expert at dirty gutter fighting and his nearness to insanity would make him that much more dangerous.

McCoy flipped on the light and stood in silence for a moment. Kirk lay unmoving on the bed, Spock sitting in a chair by his side, his fingers steepled in front of him. He glanced up as McCoy came in.

"He is stronger, Doctor."

McCoy looked at the scanner readout. There was no doubt that what Spock said was true. Kirk was still in withdrawal, but he was not nearly so close to death.

McCoy carefully gave Kirk a small sip of water and tensely waited for a reaction. None came. He sponged Kirk's face and then his body. "We need clean sheets, Spock," he said, "these are a mess." Efficiently they changed the bed, the whole time McCoy acutely aware that flickers of intelligence were showing in Kirk's eyes, even though he did not speak.

McCoy took off the harness. For a moment Kirk tensed, obviously fighting some deep, inner drive. In horror McCoy realized what it was that Kirk was fighting. His eyes flew to Spock's face and found the dark eyes locked on his. Neither of them could say anything, and both knew they would not be able to bear the sight if Kirk repeated his earlier act of begging.

In desperation, Kirk clutched onto the sheet. His memories of the last few days were a blank, but he did remember how he had been taught to beg and he remembered the relief as his willing body had dragged his screaming mind toward something horrible, although he couldn't remember what it was. It was the relief he remembered most.

Kirk's movement broke Spock's frozen stance, and he reached forward, his hands covering Kirk's whitened fingers. "Hold on, Jim," he said softly as Kirk started to pull away.

Kirk looked up at him, then at the lean, warm hands that covered his own cold, trembling ones. He opened his mouth. "Please...he...help..."

Spock's hands closed harder as he felt Kirk's grip loosen. "No, Jim, don't!" Kirk pulled away from him and crawled to the edge of the bed. McCoy caught him as he slipped off and pulled him to his feet, his arms going tightly around Kirk's shaking body.

"Jim, listen to me. Somehow someone managed to addict you to herrash. That's what's driving you, but you're winning. Don't crawl! Don't get yourself into a position where you can't stand to live with yourself! Please!"

A wounded cry escaped Kirk and he pulled away from McCoy, slowly falling to his knees, his hands grabbing, pleading. McCoy looked helplessly at Spock. Kirk was losing the battle. Whatever had brought him this far was being overpowered by his far greater need for the drug.

Immediately Spock was around the bed and on the floor beside Kirk. He grabbed Kirk's shoulders. "Think, Jim, the rose. Hold onto that image! Remember the glow - the hope? Jim - think! Reach into your mind!"

Gradually Kirk stopped shaking. His eyes cleared slightly. "Rose?" he said softly. He looked at Spock. For a long time their eyes held, then Kirk reached up and touched the Vulcan's face. "Spock?" It was the first moment of recognition, the first evidence that his brain was not utterly destroyed.

"Yes, Jim," said Spock, wondering in the back of his mind how he was managing to remain so calm. "Come, you cannot remain on the floor." Carefully he got up, lifting Kirk with him and helping him down onto the bed. "Doctor, I would suggest treating him now. He should remain calm for a while."

Kirk lay quiet under McCoy's ministering hands, although McCoy wasn't being quite as successful in controlling his tears. When they had finished, Spock and McCoy eased the soft harness back on. They stayed with him for a while, but Kirk continued to remain calm.

Finally McCoy looked at Spock. "How long has it been since you've eaten anything?"

Spock shrugged. He didn't know and he didn't care.

"There's some food in the next room. I think it's about time you ate something before you fall flat on your face. As a matter of fact, I'll join you. We can keep an eye on him from out there."

Suddenly Spock realized that he was starving. "I'll get things ready," he offered.

Ten minutes later McCoy came out and sprawled into a chair. "There's been no further slipping," he said in response to Spock's unasked question. "I was able to finally run some simple brain scans. By some miracle his brain does not appear to be damaged."

"The hepatitis?"

McCoy shook his head slowly. "It's got a good hold, but it's no worse. However, there are preliminary signs of jaundice, some yellowish staining of his eyes. He's not out of the woods yet." He glanced up at Spock. "I don't know what you did to reach him. Oh, don't try to deny it. I can see your handiwork in all of this. I would have lost him this afternoon," he continued quietly, "probably for good. Thank God you were there..."

"No, Doctor," said Spock quietly, "someone a few centuries ago knew what Jim was going through. That person touched his mind, not me."

McCoy looked at him curiously but the guarded look in Spock's eyes told McCoy that the Vulcan was not about to explain further. "Well, I suppose you would defend that as a logical statement," said McCoy, "but I doubt if you'd ever find a believer." He pushed his fork into a pile of mashed potatoes. "However, I am worried about his continued desperate craving for the herrash, Spock, and he's plainly terrified. He's still got a tremendous uphill struggle in front of him."

"He will win, Doctor."

McCoy glanced at him. "You can't win someone else's fight, Spock, not even with your willpower. If that was anyone else lying in there, I would disagree with you...actually, I'm inclined to disagree with you anyway. You were gone a long time - maybe too long. He's not a Vulcan."

"Indeed not, Doctor," replied Spock, "but he is James Kirk."

McCoy fell silent. There was no use going through the argument again. He knew he wouldn't win and he knew that Spock would never accept anything he said anyway.

After dinner, Spock left to sit with Kirk. Kirk was awake but withdrawn, showing no sign that he knew Spock was there. Spock felt his anger rise as he watched the even rise and fall of Kirk's chest. Why had he been subjected to this? What had happened to him? Spock knew from the meld that Kirk had no memory of what had happened, nor ever would have. It would remain a blank part of his life if he should indeed live.

A restless stirring brought Spock out of his daydream. Instantly he was at Kirk's side. Kirk's small cries tore into Spock, the sounds of a wounded animal begging for mercy, the cries of Kirk's addiction. The sounds brought McCoy running.

Together they desperately tried to avert another seizure, tried and failed. Kirk started to fight with more strength and the two of them had their hands full holding him as still as they could.

Finally Kirk looked at Spock. "Why?" The word was a gasp from a tortured body.

"Jim," said Spock levelly, his stomach banging against his throat as he realized how badly Kirk was slipping. "You've got to win. You cannot give in to domination by a chemical. You cannot destroy your life..."

"Please, give me...!" A scream followed close on his words. Spock grabbed his shoulders and again held Kirk firmly against the bed. The healing meld had obviously been destroyed by the drug's more powerful hold.

Finally the seizure subsided. Kirk had fought Spock every inch of the way, just as he had before the meld. Spock sagged back, suddenly wondering how much more he could take, the first time such a thought had ever entered his mind.

Kirk's haunted, pleading eyes held his for a long time, then he drew a shuddering breath. "No...no more. Please...let me...die!"

"Jim, you can't give up!"

Kirk did not answer. His eyes gradually grew unfocused. He did not appear to have heard Spock's anguished cry. He was withdrawing for the final time, preparing himself to meet the death he was finally ready to accept.

Spock suddenly knew he had to get out, get away from the tortured man. He roughly pushed past McCoy who was standing in the doorway, and practically ran to the door that led to the small yard surrounding the clinic. His mind was a whirl of confusion. Had he been wrong to reach out for Kirk's consciousness, for that spark that made Kirk the person he was? Now Kirk's mind clearly felt the agony and obviously recognized that he was dying. Would it have been kinder to have left Kirk in the twilight of nothingness? Should he have interfered? He paced in the dark night, his ragged emotions threatening to rip open and pull him apart.

McCoy started to follow Spock, then thought better of it. It was time to follow his own instincts, to stop being swayed by the determination of cold logic. He knew herrash addiction and he knew Kirk's strength, but the drug was stronger. It was nothing short of a miracle that Kirk's mind had not already been destroyed, but otherwise the drug was following classic lines. There had only been the one, brief sign that the agony of withdrawal was easing.

He stopped in the doorway and looked at Kirk, and again in his mind he saw the gruesome spectacle of Kirk groveling on the floor, begging for the drug that would destroy his life, willing to do anything for its relief. James T. Kirk, Admiral, Starfleet Command. James T. Kirk, Captain, U.S.S. Enterprise. James T. Kirk, addict. Just when Kirk's life had been given back to him - all their lives - this had to happen. Kirk had fought successful battles all his life, often against overwhelming odds, but he couldn't fight this - no Human could. Slowly, sadly, McCoy took the hypo out of his medikit. Kirk would eventually die, but at least he would be able to die with dignity.



*H*is mind was finally blessedly dark, no wild images filling it as they had been, causing helpless terror and despair. Again he saw the soft light and focused on that as it slowly grew closer. The image was fuzzy,



indistinct, and settled slowly into a pattern. A fragile flower grew in his mind, its petals reaching out to an unseen light. Kirk moved restlessly on the bed. He wanted to find the source of that light but he was being held down, forced away.

"No," he muttered, "please, I must...can't go...no...!"

McCoy hesitated by the side of the bed. What horrors was Kirk seeing now? The hazel eyes were open but utterly blank, the dark rings of suffering looking like black smudges on the pale face. What was Kirk feeling? The hypo lay heavily in McCoy's hand, its drug ready to relieve agony that had been prolonged far too long.

Kirk gradually relaxed. The light seemed to be getting stronger now. The rose enfolded him in the softness of its petals, sheltering him, the thorns protecting him from further torture. The light grew brighter and the white-hot blaze gradually took on shape and form until there was no mistaking the features.

"Spock!"

Far out in the yard, Spock's mind heard Kirk's cry. With no hesitation he ran for the clinic. He had no idea why Kirk had called out for him, he only knew he was needed.

As Kirk cried out, McCoy dropped the hypo he had just pressed against Kirk's arm. Before he would retrieve it, Spock burst into the room.

"What are you doing?" he demanded harshly, catching McCoy's wrist before he could reach for the hypo.

"What I should have done hours ago!" said McCoy fiercely. "I won't put him through this any longer. Do you think I haven't heard his screams, his pleas? Spock, he's dying, and he's got to be allowed to die with dignity!"

But Spock was no longer paying any attention to what McCoy was saying. He dropped McCoy's wrist and moved slowly to the bed.

Kirk was lying on his back, his sweat damp hair plastered to his face, the deep lines of suffering still clearly etched. But his eyes were closed, the long lashes lying unmoving on the flushed cheeks. His chest was rising and falling in the peaceful movement of deep sleep.

"Doctor...?"

McCoy grabbed his scanner and stared almost uncomprehendingly at the readout. Finally he handed it to Spock, his hand trembling.

Spock looked at the scanner and, for a brief moment, closed his eyes. The withdrawal was complete. Kirk had survived it. Somehow he had won.

McCoy bent down to retrieve the hypo, tears filling his eyes and a cold fear clutching his heart. He had been so close to giving Kirk the shot - so close to addicting him forever to the herrash's uncompromising hold. Only Spock's blind faith had stopped him from trying to do it before then, and only God knew what had prevented him from doing it now.



From the moment McCoy contacted the medical complex at Fleet Headquarters, Starfleet was in an uproar. Admiral O'Connor had everything ready that McCoy had asked for when Mike's dilapidated airvan drew up to the emergency entrance.

Nogura was there to meet them, the wrath of his office surrounding him like a mantle, but McCoy cut right through him. "This is my patient, Admiral, and at the moment he is a very sick man. I will not have any of your heavy footed infantry crashing around me or my Sickbay!"

"Your Sickbay?" spluttered Nogura.

"Yes, sir. And it is imperative to Kirk's recovery that Commander Spock be with him at all times. I will let you know when he is strong enough to talk to you."

"But you're A.W.O.L...you're...!" But there was no one left to listen to Nogura's raging. The stretcher carrying Kirk was thundering down the hallway on its way to the intensive care unit, Spock and McCoy running along side. Mike loaded the empty stretcher back into his van, laughing at the ludicrous sight of the Commanding Admiral standing on the sidewalk yelling at thin air. Giving him a cocky salute, he got in the van and drove off.

McCoy set up a battery of tests now that he had all the advanced equipment he needed. He knew that Nogura was out for blood and he'd better be prepared with every test in the book to back himself up. Kirk's life and career were still hanging in the balance.

O'Connor had rounded up every expert that Starfleet had, and Kirk was given the best possible treatment. An entire team worked nonstop to find a combination of drugs that wouldn't kill Kirk while he was recovering from all the complications caused by the addiction. Within days he was stable, his blood count and bodily functions gradually returning to normal.

Kirk's sleep was so deep as to be almost comatose. At first McCoy had been worried, but the specialist had assured him that it was a natural healing process.

Kirk slept for almost a solid week. Occasionally he would wake up for brief periods, groggy and disoriented, his body still terribly weak from the ordeal it had undergone, but within minutes he would be asleep again, a deep, healing sleep.

During this time Spock never left Kirk's side. He would help McCoy treat the now healing sores on Kirk's arms and legs. He would tell the nurses when the IV's needed to be changed. He kept careful records of anything Kirk said or did during those brief periods when he was awake.

Ten days after Kirk arrived at the medical complex, they managed to arrest the hepatitis. After three weeks all tests showed that there was no sign of any drug dependence, no sensitivity to herrorash derivatives, nor any dependence on the pure drug itself. Kirk's waking periods were growing longer and more lucid. It was time for McCoy to face Nogura.

"I will come with you, Doctor."

"No, Spock, I'd rather you stayed here with Jim. If he wakes up, he'll need you. Don't worry, I won't do anything to upset the Admiral."

"I would imagine your presence will be enough to do that," said Spock with the ghost of a smile. "I wish you luck."

McCoy nodded. "I have the feeling our future in Starfleet might depend on this. I accept your wishes."

Nogura kept McCoy waiting but if he was using it as a tactic to upset McCoy, it didn't work, nor did any of his angry tirades. McCoy simply handed him all the test results and reports, and answered all Nogura's questions with the calm competence of his experience and position. In medical matters, McCoy did not cow easily.



Spock did not notice when Kirk had awakened. When he looked up, the hazel eyes were resting on him, eyes which now held the flame of life and not just the feeble flicker that had been present earlier.

"Welcome back, Jim," he said quietly.

"Um." Kirk looked around. "Where am I?"

"Medical complex, Fleet Headquarters."

Kirk lay silent for a moment. "Funny place to be. Did something happen?"

Spock stood up. "You were very sick for a while, but you're fine now. When you are feeling stronger we can discuss it more thoroughly." He hesitated, but McCoy had told him to ask. "How do you feel?"

Kirk thought about it for a moment. "Pretty awful," he conceded. He glanced at the IV hook-ups that were attached to his arm and leg. "Looks like I must have lost my appetite." He looked down. "My arms don't look too good either." He was silent for a moment, then he looked at the Vulcan. "Spock, am I yellow or is it the light?"

Spock almost smiled as the questions came tumbling out. Kirk was definitely on the mend. "I would suggest keeping your questions for your doctor. He knows more than I do."

"McCoy?"

Spock nodded.

"Where is he?"

"With Admiral Nogura, waging what I suspect could turn out to be the battle of the century."

Kirk looked confused. "What has Nogura got to do with anything?"

"Jim, I'll explain everything later, but you need to rest. Please believe me when I say there is nothing to worry about."

"Okay," said Kirk dubiously. He settled back into the pillows and was silent for a long time. Spock thought he had drifted off to sleep when suddenly he spoke. "Spock, how did you know about the rose?" His eyes opened. It was obvious he remembered something of the past days. He knew who had put the symbol of hope in his mind.

"Dr. McCoy was watching the viewtape the night you went out to dinner with Admiral Nogura. I watched the end of it."

For a while Kirk was silent. "Did it make sense to you?" he asked finally.

Spock nodded. "Yes, it made sense." Their eyes met in quiet understanding but McCoy walked in before either one of them could say anything more.

"I did it, Spock! Hot damn, I got him on every point! We're still in Starfleet!"



Nogura didn't give up without a fight, but he had picked on three men who refused to yield.

Eventually McCoy decided that Kirk was strong enough to go through one of Nogura's grilling sessions, but the Admiral came away empty handed. He had gone into Kirk's room determined to discover exactly what had happened to him, and he had failed. From the time Kirk had walked out of the Officer's Club at Fleet Headquarters to the time he had finally woken up in the intensive care unit at the base hospital was a complete blank. All tests showed a total memory loss. Kirk simply had no idea where he had been or what had happened to him.

As Nogura got up to leave, Spock silently stepped forward. "May I speak with you a moment, sir?" he asked quietly, fully aware of McCoy's puzzled gaze but not taking his eyes from the Commanding Admiral.

For a moment Nogura returned his look, then nodded abruptly. "Very well, Commander, come with me."

Once they were in Nogura's office, the Admiral gestured Spock to a chair while he sat on the corner of his desk.

"Well?"

"Sir, I am aware of what you were attempting to discover when you were talking to Captain Kirk..."

"Admiral Kirk, Commander Spock."

A faint smile touched Spock's lips as the meaning of Nogura's words sank home. "Yes, sir, Admiral Kirk." He paused for a moment, then continued. "I had occasion to achieve a mind meld with Admiral Kirk several times during his withdrawal from the herrash..." He felt Nogura's eyes boring into him. "Admiral, have you ever heard of an organization called Sadag?"

For a moment Nogura looked blank, then recognition dawned in his eyes. "That's some insignificant renegade outfit, isn't it? Occasionally pirate old freighters, that sort of thing?"

"Yes, sir," replied Spock. "It was they who abducted Kirk."

Nogura looked at him in bewilderment. "What earthly reason would they have for doing something as stupid as that?"

"Unknown, sir. Quite likely they didn't realize who it was they had when they first took him, but you can rest assured that as soon as they knew they got out of there in a hurry. If they were indeed based on Earth they are no longer."

"No," agreed Nogura, "they wouldn't risk being caught anywhere in this sector." He sat musing while Spock slowly got to his feet.

"Admiral," he said softly. "During the last meld I had with Kirk, the madness was abating and I took the opportunity to check. There was no breakdown of command training. There was no evidence that there had ever been any attempt to force information, and none that any had been given."

"And you expect me to believe that?"

"No, sir," said Spock. "However, I believe his psyche tests will show no breakdown. I highly doubt if he was taken for any knowledge he possessed. I think it was just one large, almost high cost error which will never be repeated."

"We shall see, Commander," said Nogura abruptly. "If his psyche tests don't coincide exactly with the previous ones done on him, he is out, do you understand me? If he has broken in any way, he is grounded for good!"

Spock nodded. "He did not break, sir." Nodding formally, Spock turned and left.



McCoy made sure that Nogura was present at all of Kirk's psychological testing. This was not a man grown so weak that he wanted to die. Kirk had won a battle with herrash addiction. No man with any form of self-destructive tendencies would have been able to do it. Exhaustive psyche tests confirmed Spock's statement. There was no breakdown of command training. For all the hell he had been through, Kirk had stood up to Nogura again and shown him the man he was. Nogura finally admitted defeat and let Kirk resume command of the Enterprise, the ship he had almost taken away from him again. He finally admitted that he was never going to win his argument with Kirk, he might as well let him go.



Hyman '11

Finally the day came when Kirk was released from the hospital and allowed to go home, accompanied by a hovering McCoy. Spock had had to chair a debate at one of the science seminars and was unable to meet them at the hospital. McCoy was overjoyed at the normality of the man at his side. Kirk had been so desperately sick, so close to total destruction that it was hard to believe that he could once again be whole.

Laughing off McCoy's mothering, Kirk escaped to his room pleading the need of a hot bath and a change of clothes. He shut his bedroom door firmly behind him, half afraid that McCoy would follow him in. From the talks he had had with McCoy, he knew the doctor still felt guilt at almost readdicting him to herrash and that was one of the reasons he was hovering so closely. He put his suitcase down on the floor and looked around, savoring its familiarity.

Walking across the room, he pulled the curtains open and the sunlight streamed across the bed, outlining a single rose that lay on the pillow. Slowly he walked to the bed and picked it up, along with a tape which lay beside it. He put the tape in the player and turned it on.

Familiar words filled the room as he sat on the bed, the tormented words he knew so well now taking on a new meaning, a new hope.

He was still sitting there when a quiet knock sounded on the door and Spock entered. He saw Kirk with the flower in his hand, the words of the song softly filling the air. He shut the door quietly behind him.

Their eyes met for a moment, then Kirk looked down at the rose. "Is this a commitment, Spock?" he asked.

"If you like."

Kirk looked up, then slowly got to his feet. "Love is truly a hunger. It can and will tear you apart if it is allowed to."

"Then we must never allow it."

Kirk stood looking at the Vulcan. "How far, Spock? How much do we give?"

Spock's eyes held his steadily. "It is not something to push, Jim. We've come this far. Who is to say what the future holds?"

"Who is to say what the future holds?" echoed Kirk. For a long moment he looked at the rose, then he looked at Spock. Each was a gentle protector. Each was a promise of love. A small smile touched Kirk's lips, a smile that was reflected in the peace of the Vulcan's eyes - a silent promise of what was to come...



~~~~~ Answered Call ~~~~~

I have reached for
Infinity's curve of space,
Learned all of science and
Through science, quested more.
But infinity is empty,
A desert of cold and night,
And science answers the
Yearnings of the soul in a
Cold, impersonal computer's tone.

Now, a voice,
A soft, urging, promise-song,
Something I cannot ignore
Sings through the void.
The stars begin to swirl,
Blending the past and tomorrow,
My science and the warmth of your song.

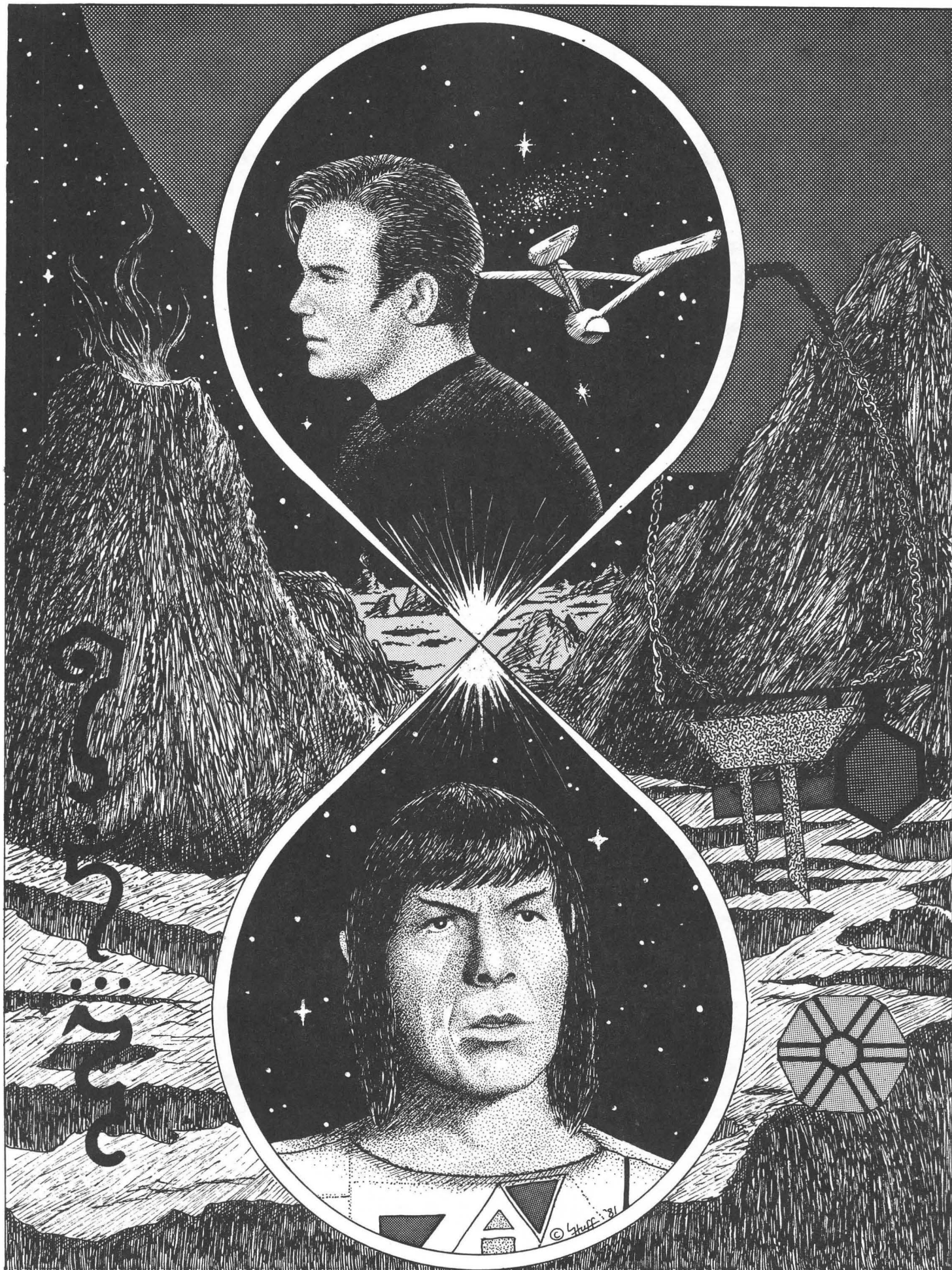
Logic crystalizes,
Dreams cry out
And reality is reborn.
Mirrored heartbeats echo through the night
The past is gone,
Dissolved,
Infinity comes closer
Filled with light.

I hear you
and here I am.

++++

Martha Bonds

GB



The Sleeper In The Valley

The structure stands white, sun corroded marble,
Slim, arching pillars carrying the proud dome above;
And she thinks with great care -- *the woman*
 with white hair, deep-sown wrinkles,
 clad in her billowing black cloth --
 of what flowers to plant to soothe its
 future dweller's never resting brows.

Lionhearts, smooth creamy flowers she'd plant,
Bravely claiming new ground on her desert world,
Weightless, floating on easy evening breezes -- *and she,*
 with wide, far-seeking glance, squinting,
 conjures the knowing innocence, the youthful stride,
 a fleeting grin brightening bewitched
 lion-colored eyes . . . soon, so soon to die.

The dome inside is cool and shady, in its
Dreamy shadows insubstantial images hide, then
Stray, ponder in unstirred stony corners -- *while she*
 disturbs the spell, enchanted, tangled in
 memories of yesteryear, weaving the web
 of future hopes and woes -- the thread of
 time running thin in her hands all the while. She waits.

The name -- two words on stone -- is brassy, like a
Shield reflecting a golden-flecked gaze. Her sight
Is drawn to the shine, drowning, misting over -- *and she knows*
 the time nears when the call would come,
 his earthly remains brought home to rest in
 embracing stone arms, cold of silence. . .
 medals, braids and memories laid in a starry, fading path.

Urgent, she moves out to the sunlight,
Hard, scorching rays of aggressive heat
Beating, invading her solitude. *From her lids,*
 parched and dry as the ageless desert around,
 a tear, warm and salty, escapes as
 she smells the lifting wind, spreads her
 mind, reads the scythed signs.

There's someone else; a life devoted whole -- thought, feeling -- to the
Other's pulsing warmth; hanging with trembling, newborn
Pleasure on the other's leading thread of gold. *And how can she,*
 eternal weaver, oracle and omen-reader,
 disrupt their pattern-in-two, ripple the order-in-beauty
 and twine; with heavy hands, their
 lives into cold, interlocking deaths?



Primordial sand around her shifts, clouding
 Red skies, in snake-dance drawing the pattern
 As the circle completes. And with sagging shoulders, *she accepts:*
 head cast in surrender she returns to the shadows,
 bent under her eternal chore
 and touches the virgin elegy-stone, to
 burn the other's name upon it. One word.

The structure stands white, sun corroded marble,
 A bright, cold jewel in the seething valley of time,
 Awaiting the sleeper. *Her face*
 is frozen hard rock now, untouched
 by her eternal blind-eyed task. And only the flowers,
 lionhearts of gold, bend
 their heads in mute lament.

The valley waits.

-- SUSAN K. JAMES --



The Bell Tolls For Thee

You came into my life
bringing love and joy,
warmth and gentleness,
a zest for living.

You made my life complete and right.

You left taking with you the sun
leaving behind a midnight desert,
barren and arid,
where no flower will blossom

I exist now on the surface of life.
My eyes see, my mouth speaks but beneath is a dark void.

A part of me will always remain behind
waiting for you to return
But life goes on and I will grow old -- still waiting.

Terri Sylvester

GB

See So Clearly

She knows...

*That which I can not hide
When I look at you, lying here
So vulnerable in pain-relieved sleep,
Weakened by the ordeal you suffered
And the need for decompression.*

Does she also know...

*The envy I feel that the touch of her hand
Can ease your pain, can wipe away
The mottled lesions that cut your wrists,
That she, not I, can relieve the pressure
Which tightens your chest with its iron-like grip,
That she can free you to breathe easily again,
And smooth the agonized crease from your brow.*

Does she know...

*That jealousy does not become a Vulcan,
Because she can remove all traces of injury,
And restore lost strength and vitality to you.
That a Vulcan can not admit to the possessiveness
That wishes to soothe the torment in your eyes.*

*Her eyes glow softly with warmth at me,
'Till I wish she couldn't so clearly see.*

Yet she could not know...

*Just what you do mean to me,
How worthy you are of that singular love,
Of which tradition binds me never to speak.
No, she does not realize how easy it is
For us to offer up all our lives
In return for whatever you might need,
Or the myriad reasons we follow your lead,
The pride in your command, the trust in your judgment,
The hunger for the friendship you share with us.*

*Her smile curves knowingly in delight,
'Till I wish she couldn't so clearly see.*

CRYSTAL ANN TAYLOR

THE TAVERN

Susie Gordon

"Captain, are you quite sure you want to accompany me to Deveroux? It will be quite boring for you," Spock said as he stood in the Captain's quarters, hands behind his back.

"Boring? Spock, I'm so bored now I could scream. Star mapping is the devil's own assignment."

"It is necessary, sir."

"That still doesn't make it any less boring. If you object to my going, I'll...stay...here." Kirk tried to put just the right inflection in his voice to set up his Vulcan friend.

"I do not object, Jim."

"Good, then I'm going." A wide grin spread across his face, his eyes sparkling with devilment. "Tell me about Deveroux. You say you've been there?"

"Yes, sir. Twice before. It is a strange planet. Unusual laws and customs. The inhabitants are humanoid, and are somewhat intolerant of outsiders, with the exception of...Vulcans. Or in my case, half-Vulcans. This time, as with the other times, I have been asked to meet and negotiate new amendments to the Federation agreement."

"But why you, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked.

"I appear to be the only Vulcan in the vicinity, Captain. It stands to reason that is why I was chosen."

"Logical, as always."

"Are you ready now, Jim?"

"Are you kidding? Let's go."

Scott met them on the hangar deck.

"The Enterprise is yours, Mr. Scott. Mr. Spock and I shall be on Deveroux for the next few days," the Captain was grinning.

"Have a bonnie trip, gentlemen."

In minutes, the shuttlecraft had left the security of the Enterprise.

"Tell me more about Deveroux," Kirk requested as he sat back in the pilot's seat.

"Strange customs..." Spock repeated. "Believe it or not, the meeting place is in the back room of a...saloon, for lack of a better word."

"Saloon? You've got to be kidding," Kirk grinned over at him.

"No, sir. Actually it is more than the word 'saloon' signifies. It is a meeting hall and overnight resting place - whatever the citizens need at any given moment. The fact that the place also serves potables is incidental," Spock finished.

"Sounds like an interesting place."

"I must caution you, Jim. Their customs and laws may seem unusual even to you. They are very intolerant of Earthers. Watch your step, Captain. I would hate to have to 'bail you out,' I believe is the expression."

"That'll be the day."



Less than an hour later, the two officers from the Enterprise were entering the Deveroux Tavern.

"Ahhh, Mr. Spock, how good it is to see you again!" A short squatty man appeared out of nowhere to stand in front of the two men. His skin was almost pure white - an implausible coloration, since the sun of this system was quite powerful.

"Hajee, it is good to see you again. Has Gzr arrived yet?"

"Yes, he awaits you in the rear hall." The short man turned to gaze coldly at the Captain.

"Forgive me, Hajee, this is my Commanding Officer and Captain of the Starship Enterprise, James Kirk. Captain, this is Hajee, owner and proprietor of this establishment."

Kirk nodded at the man, unsure how he should greet his host. Hajee made no acknowledgement at all, but went back to his friendly chatter with Spock.

"I shall bring refreshments, Spock. Gzr is waiting," Hajee walked away and Spock turned to his Captain.

"I do not believe Gzr would appreciate your presence in the rear hall at this time, Jim."

"You have met with him before?"

Spock nodded. "He can become quite irritating at times, but my constant exposure to humans has made me more tolerant of his manners."

Kirk could almost swear he saw a smile on Spock's lips.

"Of course, Mr. Spock. I understand. And I must admit I'm very proud of you. I'm discovering talents I didn't know you possessed. You can be very diplomatic and yet understated at the same time. You never told me about your Federation meetings here on Deveroux."

"There was no reason to do so, Jim. Both occurred before you took command of the Enterprise."

"Still, I'm proud of you and your accomplishments. I'm very glad I decided to come with you."

"I must join Gzr, Captain. It would not do to keep him waiting." He paused, looking meaningfully at Kirk. Time did not permit an elaboration on the various laws here on Deveroux.

"I'll be fine, Spock. Just do what you have to do. I am a big boy now," Kirk smiled.

"Really, Captain. I was of the opinion you had reached full maturity years ago," Spock arched an eyebrow.

"GO!!!"

Spock crossed the room that was crowded with tables and chairs of all sizes and shapes. A long wooden and metal bar covered one entire wall. Kirk had seen pictures of western towns in the early days of the Old West on Earth, and he thought this must be an exact copy - right down to the polished back mirrors behind the bar.

Spock disappeared from sight through a curtained archway and Kirk started toward the bar. As he came to a stop, he was tempted to prop his booted foot on the brass rail that ran the length of the bar about six inches from the floor, but he resisted the temptation.

Hajee was busy preparing a small tray for the men in the rear hall - a decanter of honey-colored liquid, two empty goblets and a container of various cracker and soft bread combinations. Kirk was very impressed by the layout of this establishment. Clearly the largest building in the settlement, it could be changed easily into whatever facility the settlement happened to need.

Kirk waited patiently at the edge of the bar, but was ignored by the 'bartender.' However, he seemed to have the full attention of the few customers seated at the tables. Peculiar looks, whispers, fingers pointing in his direction caught his eye. Still the bartender ignored him. Long,

minutes later, two men approached Kirk from either side.

"Come with us, Earther. You're under arrest," one of the pale, squatty men ordered. Apparently, everyone on Deveroux was built like Hajee.

"For what? What have I done?" Kirk inquired.

"You shall know in time. Come along," the second man growled.

"I have a friend in the rear hall," Kirk explained.

"He shall be informed. Now, move," the first man said, emphasizing his words with a sharp poke at Kirk's back. Reluctantly, Kirk left the tavern with the two men.

Hajee carried the tray through the archway and down the corridor. Sliding back the large door, he entered the ballroom-size hall. Beautiful wall tapestries, thick, heavy carpets, plush furniture of massive proportions - necessary considering the size and girth of the inhabitants - filled the room. Spock and Gzr were occupying one of the smallest of the carved tables. Both men were presently engrossed in reading the various proposals to be considered, and paid little attention to Hajee's motions as he emptied his tray.

Touching Spock on the shoulder, Hajee bent down. "Your...friend has been arrested, Spock," he whispered.

"I was afraid of that," Spock spoke flatly. "What did he do?"

"He was standing, unaccompanied, at the bar."

The Vulcan drew in a breath and released it in a deep sigh. "Where is he?" he asked.

"At the confinement building."

"Honorable Gzr, please excuse me. I shall be only a few moments," Spock pushed his chair back and made a short bow to his companion.

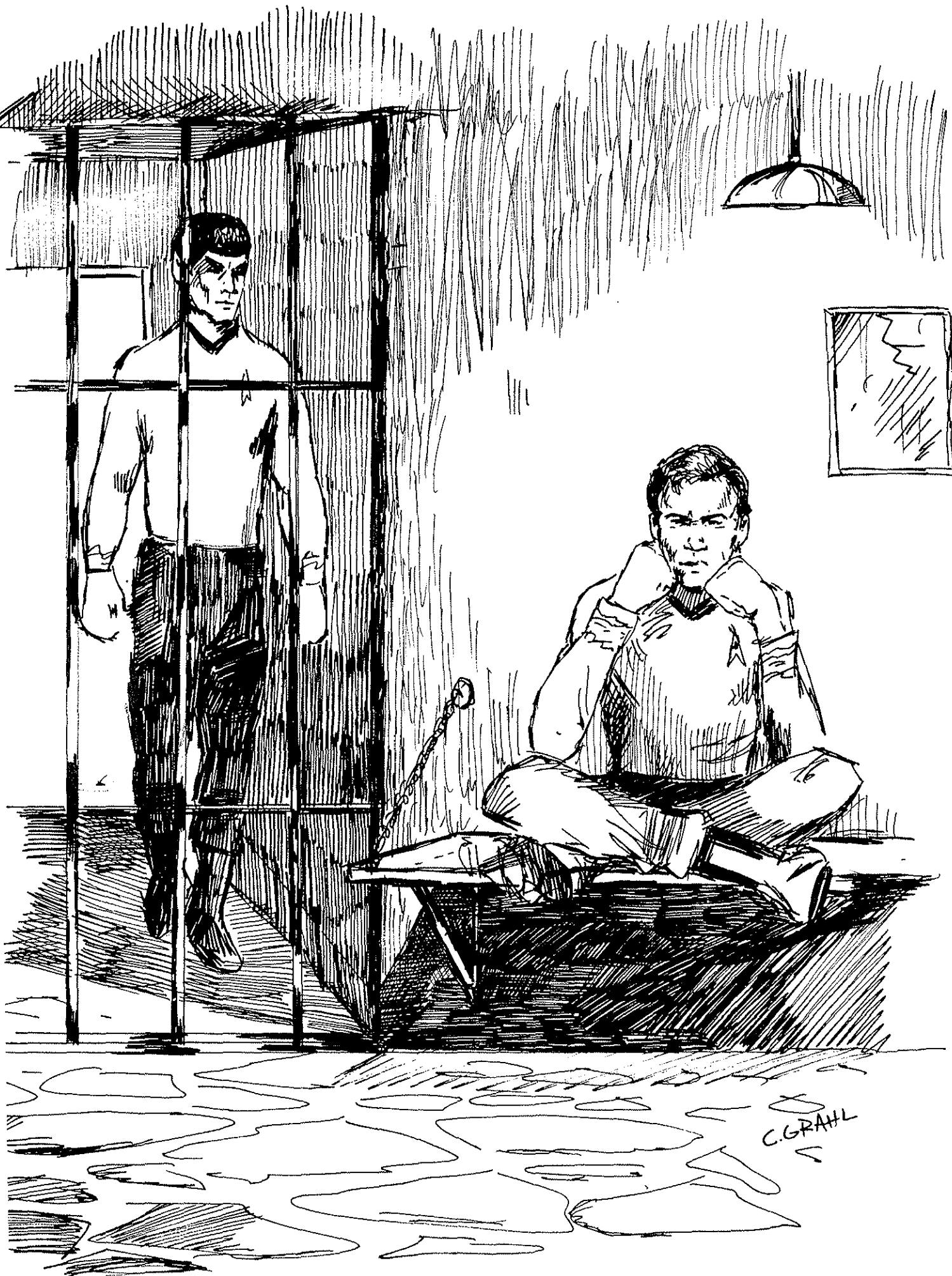
"Of course, Mr. Spock. I shall study this amendment during your absence," Gzr replied, pouring some of the honey-colored refreshment into his goblet.

When Spock entered the confinement building located across the street from the tavern, his eyes quickly searched the area for his Captain. Kirk was seated cross-legged on the wooden bunk in the first cell, elbows on his knees, head resting on his rolled-up fists. Spock was silently relieved when he saw him.

"My name is Spock," he explained to the man seated behind the high platform. "I have come to pay the fine for this prisoner."

"You know this Earther?" the man inquired disdainfully.

"Yes, I do," Spock admitted.



"Fine is ten credits."

Spock complied, using the pre-programmed computer card he knew would be accepted on Deveroux. Pressing a hidden button, the man behind the platform opened the cell door. Kirk stayed where he was, his expression unchanged.

"Come, Captain, I have paid your fine," Spock said, replacing the computer card in his waistband.

"I feel so foolish, Mr. Spock. I don't even know what I did." Kirk continued to sit indian-fashion on the bunk.

"I shall explain as we return to the tavern. I have left Gzr waiting for me," Spock explained.

Kirk's expression turned serious and he got to his feet. Leaving the cell, he and Spock walked out of the building and into the tavern.

"It is my fault you were incarcerated, Jim. I failed to make you aware of the many rules of this culture," Spock started.

"Just exactly what did I do?"

"An unaccompanied male may not seek service at the bar."

"That's it?" Kirk blurted. "That's what I was jailed for?"

"Yes. Now, if you'll excuse me," Spock walked toward the archway again.

"I'll try to be more careful, Mr. Spock," Kirk called after him.

After Spock disappeared from sight, Kirk looked around carefully. Glancing at the long bar, he shook his head. *Won't make that mistake again.* Noticing a table available against the wall, Kirk hoped to remain inconspicuous while he waited for Spock. It didn't seem his plan would work - the customers continued to stare at him long after he had sat down at the table. Looking over at the archway, hoping to see Spock, he felt someone approach. Glancing back at the man standing beside him, Kirk thought his clothes somehow looked familiar. His gaze traveled up to the man's face and he grinned when he recognized one of the two 'deputies' from before.

"Come with us, Earther. You are under arrest," the short man said.

"Not again," Kirk whispered. Rising to his feet, he led the two men over to the confinement building.

Minutes later, Spock appeared, paid the fine again and the Captain was released - again.

"What did I do this time? I stayed away from the bar," Kirk stated, trying to keep from looking Spock in the eye.

"Jim, the tables are only for parties of four," Spock explained.

"Is there anything *else* I may do wrong, Mr. Spock? Anything *else* I should be aware of?" Kirk asked as they entered the tavern again.

"Captain, there are possibly hundreds of things that could be considered infractions, but I don't have the time now to enumerate them all. I must return to GZR." Again, Spock disappeared through the archway.

Once more, Kirk scanned the room. The bar was 'off-limits.' The tables were 'off-limits.' He had been in jail twice and still hadn't had his first drink.

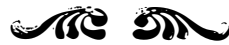
A motion from the end of the bar caught his eye and he saw a short, obese woman carrying a tray full of vari-colored drinks. Approaching the woman, Kirk turned on his charm and his widest grin.

"Are all those drinks taken?" he asked softly. The woman turned and looked at him incredulously, her eyes wide.

Oh my god, Kirk thought to himself, what have I done now?

Without a sound, he turned, somehow knowing the two men would be there...and again he followed them to the confinement building. As soon as he entered, Kirk walked into the open cell and resumed his cross-legged position on the wooden bunk. He could not believe this was happening to him.

The man behind the platform watched with fascination as the Earther passed him again. He shook his head and started filling out the paperwork.



Hajee appeared beside Spock in the rear hall once more. When Spock looked up, Hajee simply nodded in response to the unspoken question he saw in Spock's eyes.

"Mr. Spock, these interruptions are becoming disruptive," GZR stated as he saw the Vulcan getting to his feet.

"I beg forgiveness, GZR. I shall return shortly."



Spock glanced over at the cell as he entered the confinement building.

"Mr. Spock, this is really getting out of hand. Can't you do something about him?" The guard took the computer card from the Vulcan as he spoke.

"I shall attempt to do so," Spock said, turning to the cell. "Captain?"

"This is getting to be a habit, Spock."

Again they left together. Kirk's shoulders had a noticeable slump. "This time, Spock, what this time?"

"It appears you made improper advances to the owner's wife at the tavern."

"That woman was Hajee's wife?"

"Yes, Captain. Now, please try not to look for any more trouble," Spock pleaded.

"Believe me, Spock, I haven't been looking to get into trouble."

"That is what worries me."

"Worries you?"

"Yes, Jim. Worries me. What would happen if you set your mind to look for trouble?"

"Don't think about it. Now, go." Kirk tilted his head toward the archway. "This time nothing can go wrong," he finished.

"I wish I could believe that, Jim." And the Vulcan was gone again.

Kirk slowly walked to the far corner of the room and stood leaning one shoulder against the wall, arms folded across his chest. He wouldn't look at anyone. He wouldn't talk to anyone. He wouldn't do anything.

He felt a tap on his shoulder and, turning, looked right at the same two men. *This isn't possible..!*

"Gentlemen, couldn't we please talk to Mr. Spock about settling up without all the trouble of going to the jail and waiting for him to bail me out again?" he pleaded.

Without a reply, he was marched back to his cell.

When Spock appeared next, he merely shook his head at his friend.

"Jim, I do not believe this," he stated simply.

"Don't bother to tell me," Kirk covered his face.

"Bad enough to be charged with loitering but to compound it with resisting arrest..."

"Who resisted? Oh, never mind," he looked over at Spock. "Something else?"

"Trying to bribe two officers to escape confinement," Spock added.

"Bribe? Me?" Kirk shook his head. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

Spock paid the accumulation of fines and the cell door was opened again.

"Not this time, Spock. I'm staying right here 'til you get through your meeting. I will not be the cause of any more interruptions to your negotiations. Besides, it's cheaper for me to stay where I am. Also, it's

less tiring. Do you know how many times I've been back and forth across that street?" Kirk asked.

"The same number of times I have, Jim."

"Oh," he responded sheepishly, "that's right. Well, go do what you have to. I will be right here when you are ready to leave," Kirk stood his ground.

"Not allowed, Earther," the man behind the platform boomed out.

"May I ask why?" Kirk was cautious. Maybe questions weren't allowed either.

"These cells are only for arrested personnel. Your fine has been paid. You are no longer arrested personnel. You must leave," the man answered.

"You've got to be kidding. If I leave here, the whole cycle will start up again. Let me stay. I'll pay..."

"Captain!" Spock intervened.

"Bribe?" Kirk asked. The Vulcan nodded.

"What if I went back to the shuttlecraft and waited there?"

"Not allowed," the voice boomed out again.

"Damn it! What is allowed?"

"Captain," Spock started again.

"Profanity?" The Vulcan nodded.

"Jim, the various landing crafts are maintained in individual bays. The atmosphere in those small confining bays would not be very appealing," he explained.

"And this *is* appealing?!" Kirk raised his hands to indicate his cell.

"Captain," Spock held up his hand.

"Don't tell me. Raising my voice?"

"No. Speaking disrespectfully of Deveroux."

"Oh, good grief," he hesitated. "That's not profanity," he added quickly.

"Out, Earther," the man pointed toward the street.

"Yes, sir," Kirk said meekly and followed Spock outside, almost afraid to move or speak.

"Mr. Spock," Kirk rested his hand on Spock's arm. "There must be someplace, somewhere I can wait without creating a problem."

Spock pondered for a moment, so Kirk continued. "In the middle of the street?"

"Obstructing traffic."

"Sitting on the curbing? Hmmm, don't tell me. Loitering again?"

The Vulcan nodded.

"How about sitting in the park?"

"Soliciting."

Kirk shook his head. "There must be some place. How about sitting on the ground, in the park, with the birds?"

"Endangering the wildlife."

Kirk looked over Spock's shoulder and could see Hajee and his wife, the other customers in the tavern including a man Kirk didn't recognize and surmised to be Gzr, all grouped around the door and windows. They appeared to be hiding while at the same time trying to see and hear what was going on between himself and Spock. Many were laughing, others held their hands over their mouths concealing laughter. Looking back toward the jail, Kirk could see his jailor and the two arresting officers also crowding around the door, trying to suppress laughter as well.

Kirk's mind was racing. *What the devil is going on?* He squared his shoulders and, raising his head, placed his hands on his hips. An idea was rapidly forming.

"Mr. Spock," the authority was back in his voice, though the corners of his mouth were curiously uplifted.

"Yes, Captain," Spock said, his face totally deadpan.

"I have the distinct feeling I have been set up," Kirk started.

"Set up, Captain?" A questioning look, eyebrow raised.

"Yes, Mr. Spock. *Set up.* Me. I find myself in the presence of masters of the practical joke. Right?" Kirk began to chuckle and the townspeople poured out the buildings and crowded around the two men in the street.

"You're not angry, Captain?" Spock asked.

"Angry? On the contrary. All of you really had me going. Although now that I think back over it, I wonder why I took so long to tumble to it," Kirk laughed as he shook hands with the men.

"Tumble-to-it?" Spock tilted his head in question.

"Yes, you know. Catch on."

"Hmmm, you might have said so. At any rate, I'm glad you...tumbled to it when you did. I was running out of crimes."

"Then this whole trip has been one elaborate joke and all on me," Kirk continued to smile.

"Not entirely, Jim. Gzr requested certain changes in the wording of the Federation agreement, and I met with him to pick up the corrected and signed documents. They've already been returned to the Enterprise.

"Captain...Jim, maybe you would understand better if I told you the second name for this place," Spock admitted.

Kirk began to beam with recognition and touched Spock's arm again. "Don't tell me. Let me guess. This is Neptunian."

"Correct. Most astute of you. When I realized our star-mapping would bring us into this quadrant, I checked through your service record and discovered you had never been here before. Therefore, you were never initiated into the Neptunian Circle," Spock confessed. "When the message came through to pick up the documents from Gzr, I saw the perfect opportunity to 'set you up,' I believe is the term you used."

"I must admit that you were certainly a good sport, Captain Kirk." Hajee stepped forward. "Now, would you please join us for the feast in honor of your membership into our Neptunian Circle?"

"Hajee, I shall be delighted."

Kirk, Spock, and Hajee followed the others toward the tavern.

"Captain, I believe there was a similar type ceremony on Earth many years ago. Something about King Neptune?"

"Yes, Spock, there was. Notice even the similarity in names. It was a rather elaborate ceremony to initiate passengers of cruise ships when they crossed the equator for the first time."

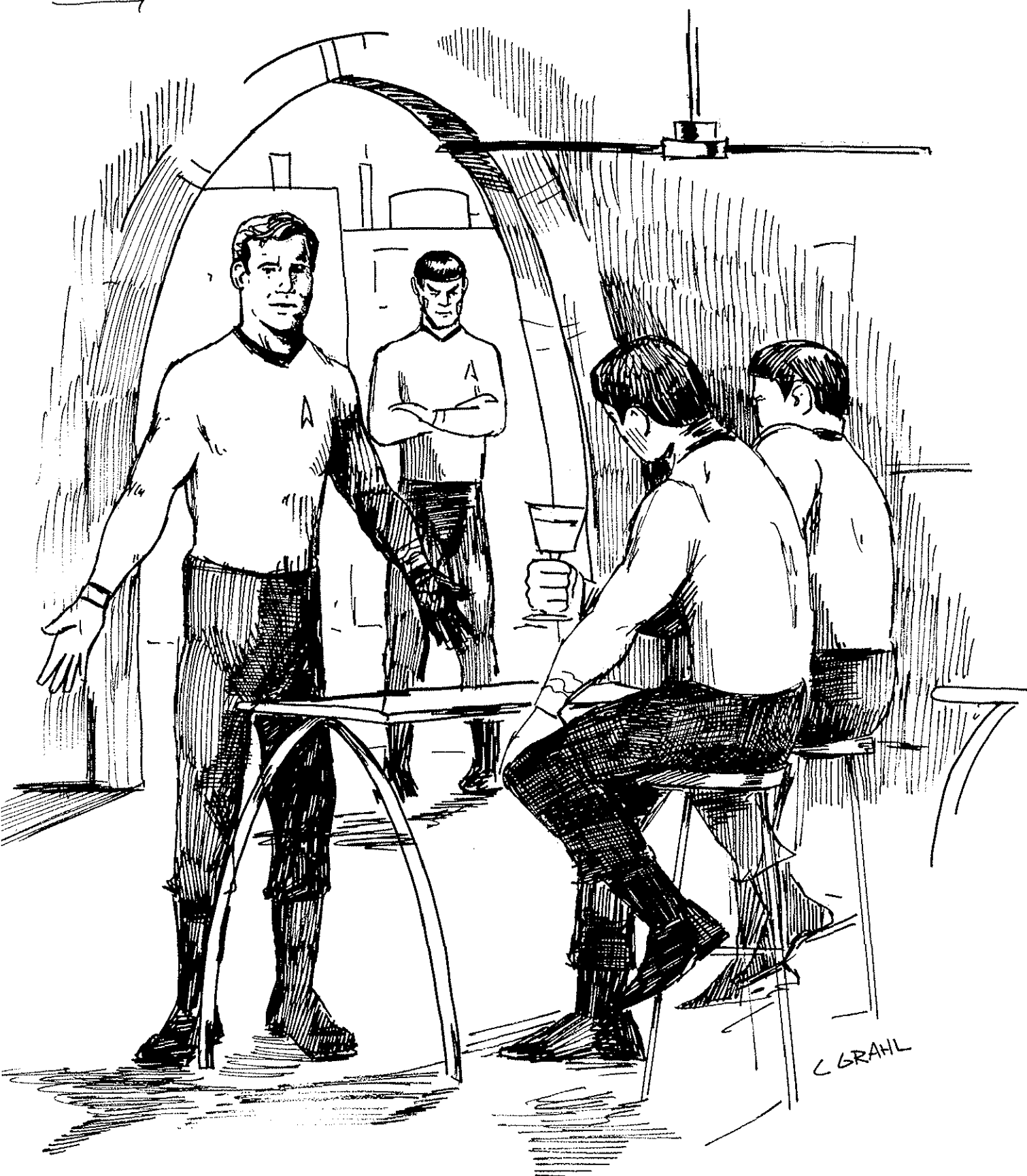
"Forgive us our childlike pranks, but what started out many years ago as a sham to take the pompous starch out of some of the commanding officers who would arrive here with their demands, their orders, their airs, has now turned into a ritual for anyone entering this part of the galaxy. Some people have had peculiar reactions when they found out the truth, that they have been fooled." Hajee shook his head.

"Some people have no sense of humor, Hajee."

"You are certain you are not upset at the deception, Jim?" Spock asked.

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Besides, I was the one that said I was bored. Come on, let's enjoy ourselves." Kirk led the way into the tavern.

At the first table inside the door, he found McCoy and Scott holding large goblets of the honey-colored liquor.



"Jim, if you could have seen your face!" McCoy slapped his knee, laughing, spilling some of his drink on the floor.

"You saw?" Kirk was shocked.

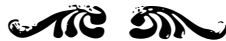
"Everything, Captain. We arrived here just before you did," Scott filled in.

"Really," Kirk's face appeared serious. "Mr. Spock, would that be considered being AWOL?"

"Possibly. Here, Captain, this is for you. Something to remember this day by," and Spock handed him a package, flat and about ten inches square.

"But first, a toast." Hajee handed the captain a large goblet of liquor. "To the newest member of the Neptunian Circle and I must say, a damn good sport...JIM KIRK!"

"Thank you one and all," Kirk responded, enjoying the celebration.



Several drinks later when the party had settled down to a less hectic level, Kirk suddenly remembered the package. Finding it under the debris on the table, he began to unwrap the brown paper. It was a sign, like one might find over a doorway. Kirk read it in a low whisper: MEMBER, NEPTUNIAN CIRCLE. FROM THE FUN CAPITAL OF THE GALAXY.

With the sign was a copy of his 'arrest record' and a bill for the fines paid in his behalf. Kirk was having great difficulty reading the arrest record: his eyes refused to focus properly. Thinking back through the 'so-called' charges against him, he started laughing. What an impressive entry *that* would be if added to his personnel file at Starfleet! His laughter continued and he reached for his chair. Attempting to sit down, he misjudged the position and he and the chair crashed to the floor in a tangle of legs, human and otherwise. Still laughing, he wiped at the tears on his cheeks, startled by his abrupt fall from grace. Rubbing at the seat of his bruised dignity, he felt a tap on his shoulder. Kirk looked up to see the two arresting officers.

"You're under arrest," one of the men stated.

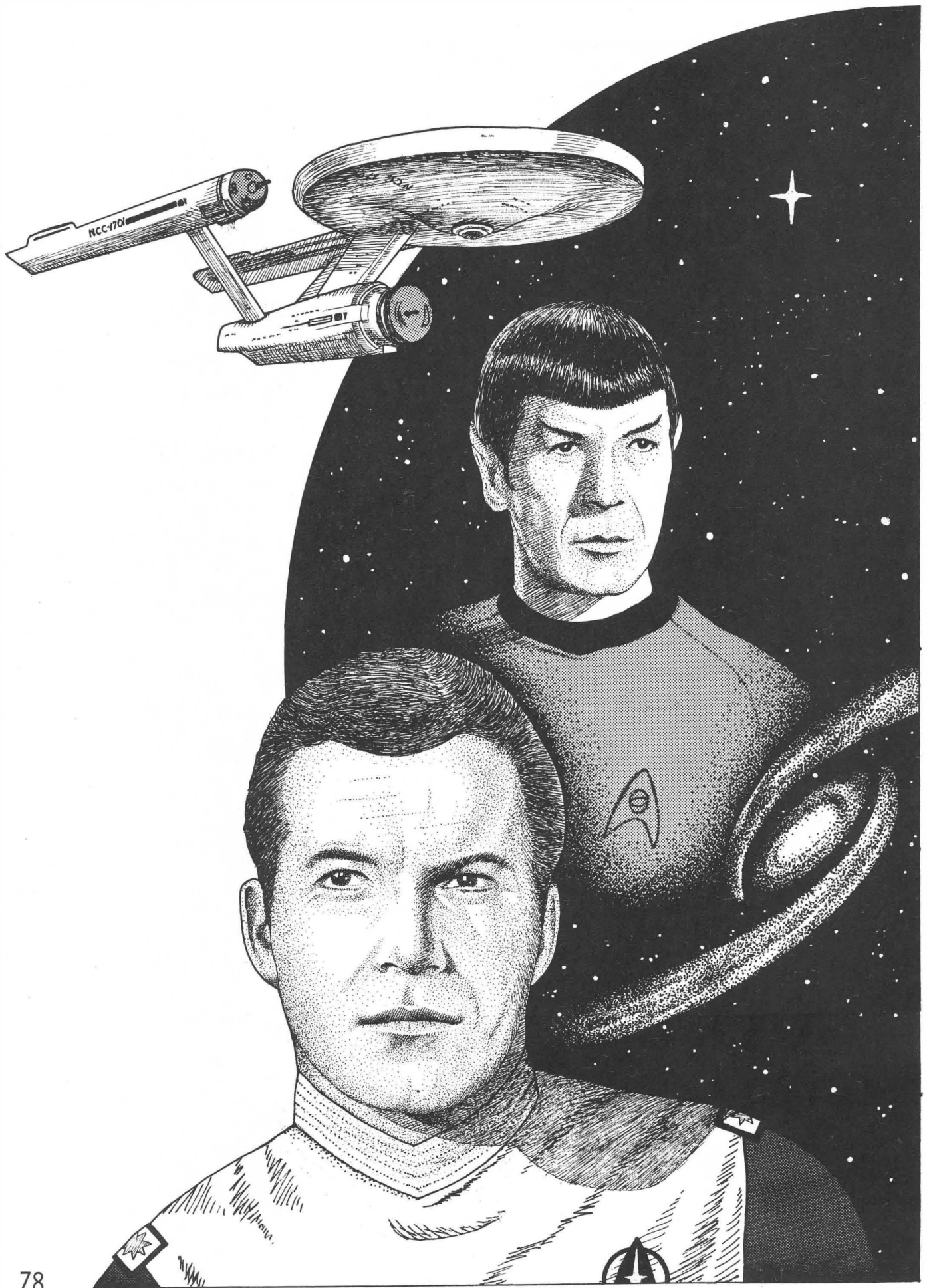
Trying to control his laughter, Kirk attempted to get to his feet unassisted.

"On...what...(burp)... 'cuse me...charge?"

"Drunk and disorderly."

"S P O C K!!!!!!!"





Star Fever

I must go back to the stars again,
on that endless vacuum ride;
And all I ask is a starship,
and that Vulcan by my side;
And velvet space, a star-strewn path,
and a new planet bound;
And galaxies spin and quasars pulse,
and infinite diversity found.

I must go back to the stars again,
for Antares calls me there;
A faraway star, it beckons to me,
as I stand in the cool night air;
And all I ask is my old crew back,
and the center seat again;
For I've always known, that's where I belong,
I and my Vulcan friend.

I must go back to the stars again,
to the life that I love so well;
To the living rocks and the loving clouds,
and the places where they dwell;
And all I ask is a captain's luck,
and the Enterprise at my command;
And to go nowhere I've gone before,
nor any other man.

--Kari Masoner

With no apologies to John Massfield -- just thanks!

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Nan Lewis '81



The Light In The Darkness

the One...
needing the Two,
having purpose rarely thought

Yet the beacon shines
to lead home the Two:
"Don't destroy the one... "

Can't hold...

swaying into two sets of arms
that reach out
to ease the frail form to rest

so silent, so still...

wisps of brown hair fall
dissarrayed over the lined brow

lips tighten with pain

· sightless eyes strain...

Jim...?
Spock...?

Don't... leave me...

the Two...
needing the One

So easy,
to let duty claim all being;
seeing the pain in each other,
but never in each self.

Without a guide...

Bones!

A stinging wetness
fills eyes that would sparkle.

An aching lump
blocks a throat
whose voice was wont to tease.

... Bones?

warm hands enfold the limp, chill fingers

as slender fingers reach up,
lightly stroking the pale cheek

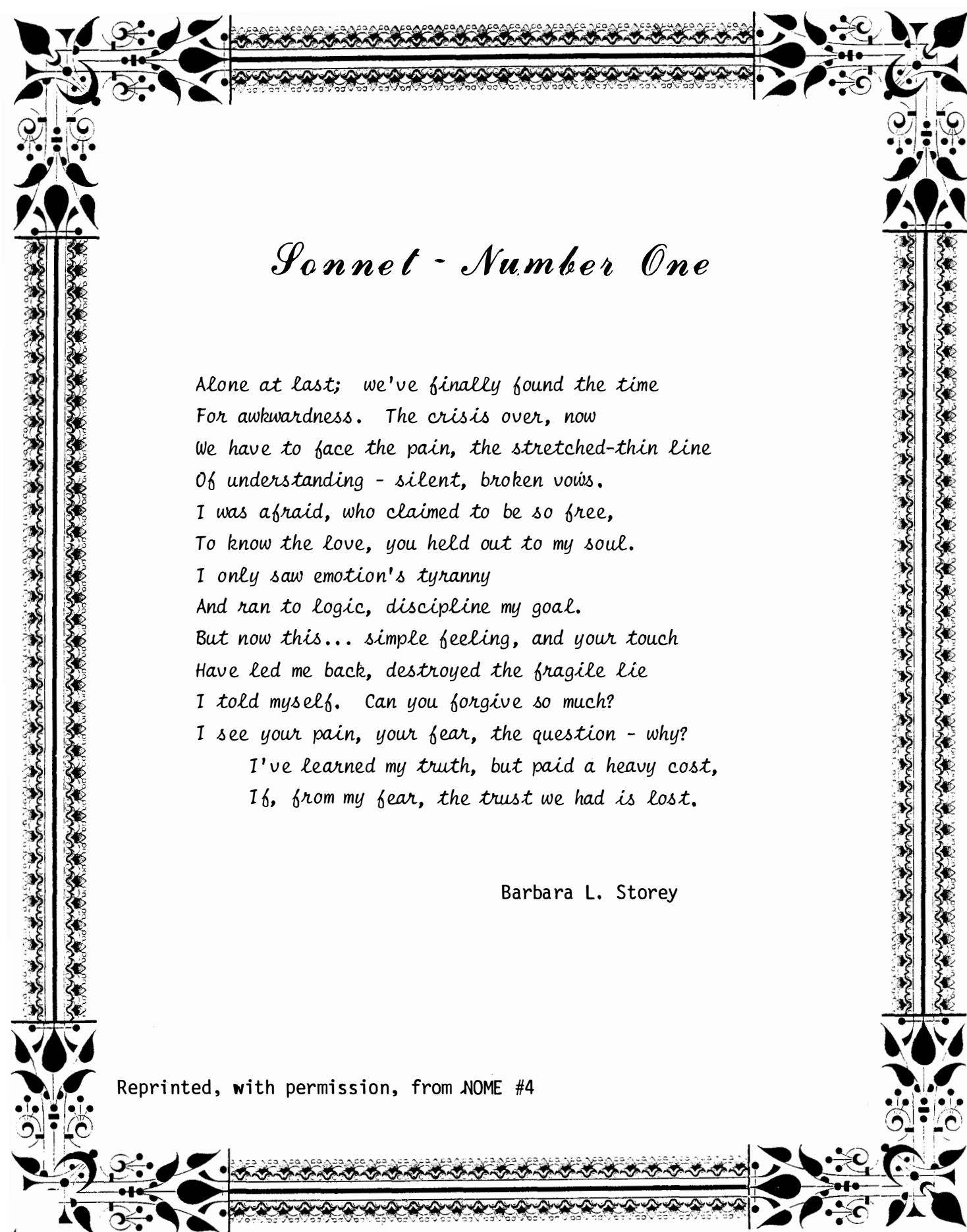
and life, so tenuous
beats faintly against Spock's thin palm

We are here.

... Don't leave us.



-- Kathryn Moore

A decorative border with floral and leaf motifs surrounds the text. It features a central horizontal band with a repeating pattern, flanked by vertical bands with similar patterns, and corner pieces with larger floral designs.

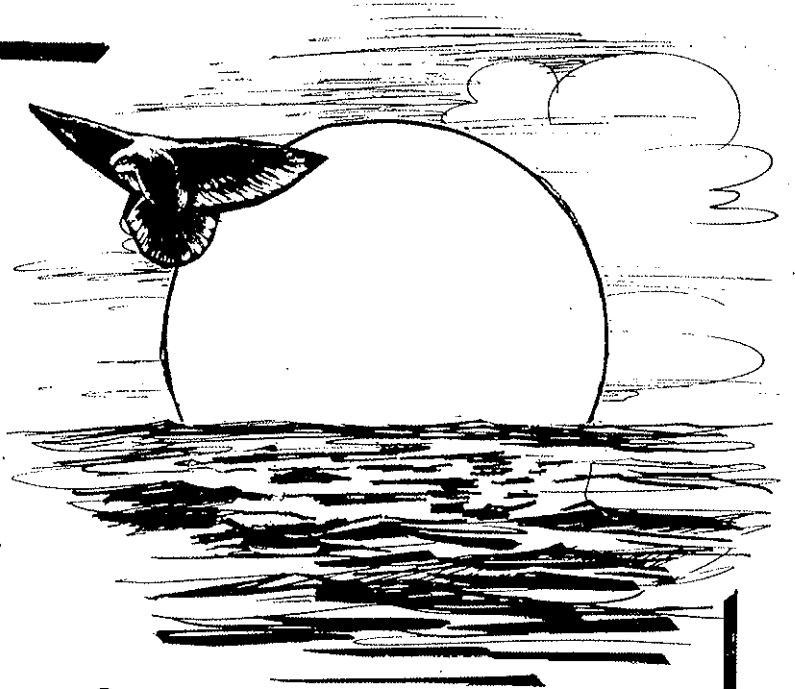
Sonnet - Number One

Alone at last; we've finally found the time
For awkwardness. The crisis over, now
We have to face the pain, the stretched-thin line
Of understanding - silent, broken vows.
I was afraid, who claimed to be so free,
To know the love, you held out to my soul.
I only saw emotion's tyranny
And ran to logic, discipline my goal.
But now this... simple feeling, and your touch
Have led me back, destroyed the fragile lie
I told myself. Can you forgive so much?
I see your pain, your fear, the question - why?
I've learned my truth, but paid a heavy cost,
If, from my fear, the trust we had is lost.

Barbara L. Storey

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WAIT FOR THE MORNING



Marion McChesney

*M*usic filled the darkened room. The Captain of the Enterprise sat curled up on the sofa in his quarters, and let himself drift with the glorious sound of the Polish Symphony. Whenever he was troubled he shut himself away from the sounds of people, and let the beauty of Tchaikovsky wash over him. The effect of the dark room made the music a part of him. Everything could be forgotten in the experience and when it ended, somehow he felt calmer, more at peace with himself and with the universe. Music seemed to do for him what meditation did for Spock.

The mission just completed had been difficult, the most difficult that Kirk had had to deal with in quite some time. In transporting the Klingon ambassador to Babel for the peace conference, the ship had been attacked by an unidentified vessel. Two crewmen had been killed and the ship damaged before the attacking ship could be destroyed. The ambassador had been of the opinion that it had been a rival political faction within the Klingon Empire which had sent the attackers. They did not want peace with the Federation.

Kirk had never been able to reconcile himself to the loss of even a single crewman and this time was no different. Monroe and Norton's deaths had weighed heavily on his mind for the past two days. He felt responsible somehow, though

there was nothing he could have done which would have prevented it. He felt the need to be alone for a while and since they were enroute to a space dock for repairs, there was no pressing need for his presence on the bridge. He could relax and sort out any doubts that remained. The last strains of music faded away just as the buzzer sounded.

"Come." Kirk moved to put on the lights.

The door slid open and McCoy entered, carrying a tray with a bottle and two glasses. "I thought you might like one of my specialties." The Doctor sat the tray on the desk.

"You must have been reading my mind, Bones," Kirk replied with a grin.

McCoy sat down opposite the Captain and poured the brandy, handing one to Kirk. He leaned back in his chair and relaxed, scanning the man in front of him. He knew Kirk well. Everytime time a man was lost, Kirk seemed to withdraw within himself for a few days. Fortunately, he also possessed a remarkable resiliency, always bouncing back.

"You're not still blaming yourself, are you Jim?"

Kirk reached over, patting his friend on the shoulder. "No, it's just that it's so hard to lose them. They were so young. This was Monroe's first tour of duty."

Kirk seemed to question every decision he had to make, but it apparently did not interfere with the performance of his job.

McCoy decided that it was time to change the subject, and brought up something he knew was on everyone's mind these days.

"What do you plan to do with your shore leave? It isn't often we get two weeks at a place as nice as Starbase Ten."

Mention of shore leave brought a broad smile to Kirk's face. "I had thought of going on a camping trip."

"Camping? I wouldn't have thought that was your style." McCoy was obviously suprised.

"There are a *few* things about me you don't know, Doctor. As children, my brother Sam and I used to go camping together a lot. It's been a long time and I happen to know that Starbase Ten has the best camping reserve in this quadrant." He paused, eyes gleaming. "I thought I'd arrange for a few horses and just take off into the hills."

"A *few* horses? You can only ride one at a time, you know," replied McCoy, a hint of suspicion in his voice.

"Well, Doctor, if you're real good, I just may invite you to go along."

You and Spock." Kirk was enjoying the Doctor's discomfort. He knew that the last thing in the world that McCoy wanted to do was go camping.

"You couldn't get me on a horse if you paid me ten years salary as a bonus. I don't trust them."

Kirk was highly amused. "Don't tell me you're afraid of them, Bones?" he teased.

McCoy was indignant at the suggestion, but after a moment decided that discretion was not the better part of valor. "You're darn tootin I am, Captain Sir."

Kirk laughed and reached for his glass. It slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor. "Damn," he said, irritated at himself.

"Getting clumsy in your old age, hey Jim?" McCoy let a wide grin spread across his face.

"Very funny."

The intercom sounded. Kirk reached over and flipped the switch. "Kirk here."

Uhura spoke from the screen. "Captain, I'm receiving a message from Starfleet Command."

"Pipe it down here."

Commodore Barstow appeared on the screen. "Captain Kirk, I'm afraid your date in space dock will have to be postponed. You are to proceed to Rigel II and pick up a Nils Barris, and deliver him to Vulcan as the new Federation ambassador. Barstow out."

"View off," said Kirk. He sat staring at the blank screen, stunned, remembering the last time he'd run into Barris. It was during the Sherman's Planet affair two years ago. Barris had been a man extremely difficult to get along with, filled as he was with an exaggerated sense of his own importance.

McCoy watched, expecting the Captain to explode because the crew would have to wait once more for shore leave. Then, to the Doctor's amazement, Kirk launched into a gale of laughter, tears rolling down his cheeks.

McCoy was fascinated. He thought Kirk had gone crazy. Personally he didn't think the news of Barris' appointment was very funny.

Kirk's laughter gradually subsided and he wiped the tears from his eyes. "Sorry Bones, but it suddenly struck me as ludicrous that that overbearing, pompous jackass is the new ambassador to Vulcan." He thought about it for a moment and his eyes lit with anticipation. "Wonder what Spock will have to say about this." His grin spread. "I'll tell him right now. He's been

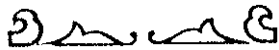
off duty all morning and probably hasn't heard." He started to rise from his chair, but a wave of dizziness came over him and he sat back down.

McCoy noticed. "Anything wrong?" he asked, concerned.

"Of course not," Kirk replied. "It's just that I laughed so hard I made myself lightheaded. I'm fine," he reassured the Doctor.

"You're sure?"

"Positive, Bones. Don't be a nag," insisted Kirk.



The Captain was right about Spock's reaction. While the Vulcan didn't say anything, or give any outward sign, except for an arched eyebrow, Kirk knew that inwardly his friend was puzzled.

The trip to Rigel II was uneventful. The crew was naturally disappointed, but they were mostly veterans and had learned to take things as they came. If nothing else, Kirk was looking forward to the visit to Vulcan. Spock had promised to show him his world if ever they were there with enough time to spare. Their last visit on the occasion of Spock's aborted marriage had been all too short. When he brought up the subject, he discovered that Spock had already contacted Sarek and Amanda telling them to expect a guest for about a week. The ship would be in orbit at least that long, in order to satisfy all the diplomatic functions that would have to be attended, as well as the formal turning over ceremony at the embassy.

"Approaching planet." Sulu looked up from his screen.

"Standard orbit," Kirk ordered.

Uhura turned from her station, hand on her earpiece. "Transporter control reports that Mr. Barris and his party are ready to beam up."

"Have them stand by," replied Kirk. He pushed himself up from his seat, feeling strangely fatigued. He was not eager for the ordeal of meeting Barris, but there was no choice. As Captain of the Enterprise, welcoming visiting dignitaries on board was part of his job, a part he did not particularly like. He sighed audibly, then turned to the science station.

"Well, Mr. Spock, care to join me in the transporter room?"

The expression on Spock's face seemed to ask, 'must I?' "Of course, Captain."



Chief Kyle was on duty, and waiting for them to arrive before he activated the controls. Kirk and Spock stood beside the console as the mechanism was

activated. As they watched, two life forms materialized on the platform. Nils Barris stepped down, holding the hand of a lovely black-haired Vulcan woman.

The ambassador nodded, then turned to the woman at his side. "Captain, Mr. Spock, may I present my wife, T'Kai."

Spock was visibly startled and one eyebrow arched characteristically. After a momentary pause, he raised his hand in the Vulcan salute.

"We come to serve."

If Spock had been startled, Kirk was absolutely floored, but he didn't forget his manners. He smiled and welcomed them on board, watching Barris carefully. The change in the man was amazing. He seemed self-assured, respectful, even dignified, not at all the man that Kirk remembered. The surprise made him forget how tired he had been only a few minutes before.



At dinner that first night, Kirk had a chance to study the woman whom Barris had married. Like most Vulcans, she did not make small talk, speaking only when there was something to say. Nevertheless, she impressed Kirk. One of the reasons for Barris' appointment no doubt had been his wife.

The trip turned out to be a welcome surprise, for now Kirk didn't have to try inventing ways to avoid Barris. Time seemed to fly, and all too soon they were approaching Vulcan. Kirk and Spock escorted the ambassador and his wife to the transporter room, and watched as they beamed down to the welcoming reception committee. Then after turning over the ship to Commander Scott, with orders to authorize shore leave for all off duty personnel, Kirk, Spock, and McCoy transported down, materializing in front of Spock's family home.



As the shimmering stopped, McCoy turned to gaze at the mountains in the distance. Kirk's knees gave way, and he stumbled. Spock reached out, preventing him from falling, his eyes questioning. Kirk shook his head, silently letting the Vulcan know that he was all right. Then McCoy turned and grabbed Kirk's arm.

"Jim, look over there!" His voice was excited, as he drew the Captain's attention to a herd of deer-like animals passing nearby.

As the two humans stared at the scene, Spock covertly watched Kirk, but the Captain seemed all right and he dismissed his concern.

The house was a one story sprawling white stone building, totally devoid of ornamentation, yet it seemed to draw the eye. It was lined in front with a type of bush resembling evergreen.

Sarek and Amanda stepped forward to greet them and escorted them inside. They entered through an arched doorway. The interior was sparsely furnished, with very little wall decoration.

The only room that seemed even the least bit cluttered was Amanda's study. It was the one room she allowed to be completely hers. Even Sarek did not enter there without permission. It had been a long time since she'd had visitors from Earth, and she enjoyed showing Kirk around while Spock and Doctor McCoy talked with her husband in his study.

Her room was filled with memorabilia, books, papers, portraits of family and friends. There was one picture in particular that caught the Captain's eye. It was of a small boy, perhaps eight years old, dwarfed by the immense size of the animal he was hugging. Amanda noticed his glance and smiled.

"That's Spock. The animal he has a stranglehold on was his pet sehlat, I'Chaya. They were inseparable. When the poor thing died, Spock was devastated." She handed the picture to him for a better look.

Kirk took it gingerly. *Such a solemn expression for such a small boy. Wish I'd known him then.* He held it out to Amanda and it slipped from his fingers, falling to the floor. The glass broke. Kirk's face turned red from embarrassment. As he bent to pick up the pieces, he looked up at Amanda, and stumbling over his words, tried to apologize.

She smiled, assuring him that no harm was done, only the glass had broken and that was easily replaced.

Despite Amanda's assurance, Kirk felt foolish. He couldn't understand how he had been so careless. He apologized a second time and would have a third, had not Amanda put a finger to his lips, silencing him.

"Please, Captain. There is no need to keep saying you're sorry. It's all right." Then she turned, guiding him to the terrace in the rear of the house, showing him her garden, filled with flowering cactii of all kinds.

Looking back on the day's events later that night, Kirk reflected that it had been one of the most enjoyable times he'd had in a long while.



The next week was a busy one. Doctor McCoy spent most of the days at the medical center in the nearby town observing Vulcan surgical techniques. Kirk and Spock spent the time with Sarek and Amanda, or exploring the surrounding countryside. In the evenings, there were a myriad of activities, all diplomatic, which they were required to attend. It was the one part of his job that Kirk found boring. Social niceties were not his forte. He was sorry, however, when their time on Vulcan drew to a close, for he had come to admire his friend's parents and enjoyed their company.

Kirk and McCoy beamed back to the ship first, leaving Spock to say his farewells privately. Before the Captain left, Amanda had given him a small package wrapped in plain brown paper, instructing him to open it later. He placed it on his desk upon returning, and went to the bridge. It was some time later, and he was just about to go to bed when he remembered it. Opening the package, he found the picture of Spock that he had seen on the shelf in

Amanda's room. There was a note. "Jim, I have had the glass repaired. Please accept this with my best wishes, and gratitude for what you have done for my son. Amanda."

Kirk smiled and placed it gently on the shelf behind his bed.



Starfleet Command, having deemed the week on Vulcan sufficient leave time for them, ordered the Enterprise to investigate a signal emanating from a planet in a relatively unexplored region of the galaxy. Even at warp speed it would take a few weeks to reach the area, and in the meantime, there was little to do besides routine details. Kirk was bored. He hadn't seen his Chief Medical Officer for days. The Doctor had been closeted for almost a week working on a pet research project. He would have been able to come up with some way to ally the boredom, but he was occupied.

Kirk looked over at the science station, manned by Commander Spock, who at the moment was attempting to explain some of his programming to his new assistant. The young lieutenant was none too pleased to be on the receiving end of a long winded lecture. Kirk smiled. *At least Spock's staff isn't bored. They're far too busy.* Ever since they had received their new assignment, the Vulcan had busied himself with interminable inspections and equipment checks, and in the process, kept his people's minds too occupied to be bored.

Yeoman Tamara approached from the direction of the engineering station, and handed Kirk a fuel consumption report. Suppressing a sigh, he signed it and handed it back to her.

Spock had been watching the Captain, as he found himself doing a lot lately. There seemed to him that something was wrong, and he hadn't been able to put his finger on what it was.

Kirk pushed himself wearily out of his seat and headed for the turbolift. "I'll be in my quarters, Spock," he said as the door slid shut.

Thoughtfully, Spock stared after him.



Kirk was lying on his bed, hands under his head, when the buzzer sounded later that night. "Come."

The door slid open and Spock entered, chess board tucked neatly under his arm. "A game of chess, Captain?" He noticed the photograph above Kirk's head, but said nothing. Inwardly, he smiled.

Kirk threw his legs over the side of the bed and sat up. He wiped his face with his hands and took a deep breath.

"Why not," he said.

Technically, Spock was a better player than the Captain, but that did not usually help him win. Kirk's rather unorthodox method of playing simply couldn't be predicted, and as a result Spock almost always lost. But not tonight. The Vulcan won two games in quick succession. The Captain played an amateur's game and several times knocked a piece off the board. Spock was becoming concerned, but his inquiries met with protests that there was nothing wrong.

The next day on the bridge, Kirk was distracted. He had slept badly, and getting up in the middle of the night, had walked right into a wall, mistaking it for the door to the bathroom. As a result, he had a splitting headache. He spoke only when spoken to, and then in terse replies. When their respective shifts were over, Kirk went to his quarters, and Spock went to sickbay to talk with Doctor McCoy.



He found the Doctor in the research lab, working on his latest project. McCoy was irritated at the interruption.

"Well Spock, what is it? I'm busy now. These test can't wait. My specimens will spoil."

"I must speak with you about the Captain."

"Is something wrong?"

"I'm not sure."

McCoy peeled off his skintight gloves and motioned Spock to the office. They sat facing each other and the Doctor leaned forward.

"Well, go ahead. What is it?"

"Have you noticed anything odd about the Captain's behavior lately?" asked Spock.

"In what way?"

"He drops things."

"So does everyone, occassionly."

"That's not all. He stumbles easily, his co-ordination is off."

McCoy frowned. "Anything else?"

"He seemes...tired...it's hard to explain, Doctor. He denies anything is wrong. I wonder if you would look in on him."

McCoy nodded. "He'll probably tell me nothing is wrong as well. Is he still on the bridge?"

Spock shook his head. "No. He went to his quarters."

"Fine. I'll go right now."

Spock nodded his head in acknowledgment. "Thank you, Doctor," he said curtly and left.

McCoy cleaned up hurriedly, knowing that Spock was not one to cry wolf. If he felt something was wrong, then there probably was.



Kirk was sitting at his desk working on some reports. He hated doing them and usually put it off until the last minute. It was an indication of how slow things had been that he was actually getting them done ahead of time.

The buzzer sounded and he looked up as the Doctor entered.

"Something I can do for you, Bones?" asked Kirk.

McCoy sat down, casually throwing his arm around the back of the chair. "Just felt like chatting for a bit."

"I'm pretty busy, Bones. I really have to finish these reports."

"Come on, Jim, a few minutes won't bring the universe to an end."

Kirk smiled, and sat back. "You're right, of course. Besides, any excuse is a good excuse. I hate these damn things." He gestured to the papers on his desk.

"How are you feeling, Jim? Anything bothering you lately?" asked McCoy offhandedly.

Kirk leaned back in his chair. "No...nothing."

"You're sure?"

"What's going on?" Kirk moved to the edge of his seat. "First Spock, now you. I'm fine. There's nothing wrong. I'm just a little tired, that's all." He stodd. "All this inactivity, I guess."

McCoy nodded, not completely convinced by Kirk's explanation. "Too much boredom, eh? Remember that, Captain, the next time we're in the middle of a crisis," he teased. "Nevertheless, I promised Spock I'd check you over."

Kirk walked to the table and picked up a bottle. "Have a drink?"

McCoy sighed. "Very well, but then we go to sickbay and I examine you. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," said Kirk, as though he were humoring a child.

He poured two drinks and reached out to pass one to McCoy. It shattered in his hand the pieces fell to the floor. Startled, he stared at them, then at his hand. Blood was streaming from his palm, beginning to drip onto the floor. He stood transfixed at the sight.

McCoy stared in amazement. "Jim, you didn't feel that, did you?"

Kirk looked slowly from his hand to the Doctor in bewilderment. "No... I didn't." Frightened, a knot of fear gripped his stomach.

McCoy went into the bathroom and returned with a clean towel, wrapping it around Kirk's hand. Though the wound was very deep, what really worried the Doctor was the the Captain had not felt anything, still did not feel anything.

"That does it. No excuses. We're going to sickbay. First, I'll treat that hand and then you're getting a complete physical."

Kirk let himself be led, too distracted and confused to argue.



McCoy put him through every test he could think of, but nothing showed up. The pain in Kirk's hand was throbbing now and his head was pounding. The Doctor gave him a sedative to ease the pain and enable him to sleep. He was worried about the apparent lack of sensation, and decided to do a brain scan. It was rare when this was necessary, but all other tests had failed to disclose anything.

A short time later, as Kirk slept, McCoy examined the resultant holographic photograph. There was a shadow present that should not be, so he did another scan to be sure, but it was there as well. McCoy shuddered, knowing that the findings indicated surgery would be necessary. It wasn't going to be easy to tell Kirk, but in any case, there was no need to do so until morning. *Might as well let him sleep.*

Going to his quarters, the Doctor tried to rest. He knew he shouldn't be treating Kirk, he was much too close to him. But he wouldn't, couldn't let anyone else do it. His mind went over and over all the little things that could go wrong with surgery of this type. Though he felt the odds were very good, it was still major surgery, and there was so much that could happen. Especially, with the brain. *We still know so little about it.* A laser cut that seemed to be right, if a centimeter off, could destroy a life. Fear sliced through him. He suddenly felt so very old. He worried over a thousand little details, almost forgetting that he had promised to let Spock know the results of the examination. Going to the intercom on his desk, he summoned the Vulcan to his cabin. Spock was at his door almost before the echo of his request had died.

"I have the results now," said McCoy.

"Tell me," said Spock.

"I've submitted him to a complete physical, including a brain scan. There is a shadow present. I suspect a brain tumor. He's sleeping now, and I haven't told him yet. I want you there when I do."

Spock's voice registered a distinct quiver. "Is it operable?"

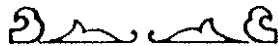
"Yes."

"How soon will you do it?"

McCoy considered. "As soon as possible, delay is dangerous. I'll plan to operate tomorrow afternoon."

"I will be there, Doctor, whenever you want," said Spock. "I appreciate your telling me. Good night." The calm steady voice belied his racing emotions and feeling as though he were dying by inches, he turned, leaving quickly, before his composure crumpled, revealing to McCoy his fear.

If I didn't know Spock better, I'd think I had just informed him that Jim had nothing more serious than a hangnail.



Spock went quickly to his quarters and when the door slid shut behind him, leaned against it, taking deep breaths in an attempt to calm himself. He spent most of the night in meditation, trying to compose his thoughts, but the nagging fear that consumed him would not pass. *What's this going to do to Jim?* When at last, he drifted off to sleep, his rest was plagued with dreams, nightmares in which his friend died, over and over again, each time more unpleasantly and painfully than the last. No matter how hard he tried, no matter the price he paid, he couldn't save him. When he awoke, he was bathed in sweat. It took all of the mind disciplines he'd acquired over the years to bring himself under some kind of control once again. To others, he would appear calm, but inside the fear remained.



The next morning, McCoy discovered that Kirk had gone back to his own cabin during the night, but then, he hadn't confined him to sickbay. *Perhaps, it is best that way, to tell him there instead of in the sterile atmosphere of the sickbay.*

He signalled Spock to meet him on deck five and though McCoy was closer, the Vulcan was impatiently pacing the corridor in front of the Captain's quarters. He pushed the buzzer as soon as he saw the Doctor approaching.

"Come," said a voice from within.

Kirk was dressing when they entered. They waited in silence as he finished. The look on McCoy's face told Kirk that it wasn't good news. Finally, he was ready and they sat around the table.

Well Bones, what's the verdict?" Kirk tried to hide his apprehension.

McCoy hesitated for an instant. His heart beat faster, and he swallowed the lump that had risen in his throat.

"I've done all the tests," he said, then paused.

"And?"

McCoy bit his lower lip, cursing inwardly that he was present at this time, in this place. He wished he were elsewhere.

"I took a brain scan as well. There's a small tumor present."

Kirk went white. Spock reached over, gripping his arm for support.

"Malignant?" he asked, fearful of the answer.

McCoy shook his head slightly. "I don't know yet, but the odds are in your favor. I'd like to operate as soon as possible."

"What happens if you don't operate?" asked Kirk. He had regained his composure and wanted to be sure of all his options.

For a moment McCoy thought that perhaps the Captain would object to the operation. "The symptoms would become progressively worse."

"When do you want to do it?" asked Kirk.

"This afternoon."

Through it all, Spock had remained silent, eyes never leaving the Captain's face.

Kirk turned to him. "What do you think, Spock?"

"I agree with the Doctor. Time is crucial."

Kirk sighed. "Very well, Bones. I'm in your hands." He wouldn't admit it, but he was scared, really scared for the first time in his life.



McCoy was scared too. It had been years since he had been this nervous about performing surgery. Determinedly, he forced it away and approached his friend with the cool skill of his profession.

Spock waited anxiously in the outer office, as in the operating room, the surgical procedure began.

McCoy and Nurse Chapel moved precisely and with considerable deftness at their jobs, conscious of the fact that even one slip of the laser could

be fatal. When the brain had been exposed, the extent of the tumor was revealed. Looking up, McCoy saw Chapel's eyes on him, expectantly waiting, hoping for reassurance of what she could not see of the operation herself. He glanced away quickly before she could read the pain in his face. Without speaking he proceeded to remove as much of the tumor as possible.

"We'll close now," he said finally, his tone offering no answers to the nurse's unasked questions.

While the Captain was in the recovery room and Spock watched over him, the Doctor took a sample of the removed tissue to the lab. This test he insisted on doing himself. When the analysis had been completed, he had the scientific confirmation, yet he refused to believe what he had found. He double checked his tests and then the equipment itself, but there was no mistake.

A wave of helplessness came over him and he slumped in a chair. Tears welled up in his eyes, but he blinked them back, for if he gave in, there'd be no end to them. He had to at least attempt to keep some kind of professional detachment. He felt useless; even with all his skill, his years of experience and training, there was nothing he could do to help the man who meant more to him than his own family.

Spock kept a vigil by Kirk's bedside, watching his friend's chest rise and fall in even strokes. He'd seen Jim Kirk hurt before, seen him on the edge of death before, but always known that somehow he'd survive. But this time, the dreams of the night before remained with him, eating at his mind. *So much a part of me. He can't die. He can't...perhaps the worst is over.* The thought helped keep his grip on sanity.

For McCoy, for all of them, the worst was just beginning, and the Doctor didn't know which was going to be more difficult - telling Spock, or the Captain. He stood quietly at the door of the recovery room and watched Spock for a moment. It had been only in the past two years that the Vulcan had started relating to people, and it was because of Kirk's influence. If Kirk died, McCoy worried what would also happen to Spock. Slowly, he moved into the room.

Spock heard footsteps behind him and felt the slight pressure of a hand rest on his shoulder. He turned to see the physician, features set in a professional mask. Fear shot through him at the tragic look the Doctor's eyes could not conceal.

"What is it?" he asked.

McCoy paused for a moment. "I'd like to talk to you. In my office."

The tone of the Doctor's voice heightened the fear. Taking a last look at Kirk. Spock rose and followed McCoy out the door and into the outer office. He seated himself, while the Doctor paced the floor. Finally he asked, "You've completed the tests?"

McCoy spun sharply on his heels and faced Spock. He blurted it out almost angrily. "It was malignant."

Not wanting to believe what he had heard, Spock asked him to repeat it.

McCoy sank down into the chair opposite the Vulcan, staring him in the eye. "It was malignant." His voice was an anguished whisper.

Spock sat stiffly, eyes focused straight ahead. "You must be mistaken, Doctor."

McCoy shook his head. "No mistake."

"Please run through your tests again. I'm sure you will find that there was an error," insisted Spock, trying to deny the truth.

The Doctor closed his eyes wearily and when he opened them again, they were filled with compassion for the man across from him, but he couldn't offer any hope.

"Spock... I even checked the equipment to make sure that it wasn't malfunctioning. I double checked my tests. There is no mistake...I'm sorry."

Logic dictated that further denial was futile, but still he could not, would not accept it. Hope was illogical, but he seized upon it. "What are his chances?"

McCoy hung his head. "There are some treatments to slow down the progress of the tumor's growth." He hesitated, lifting his eyes to meet the Vulcan's. "But that's all I can do."

To Spock, McCoy's voice seemed to come from a distance.

"Spock, try to understand. Brain cells do not regenerate, now you know that. In order to remove all of the growth and insure against a recurrence, I would have to remove so much of the brain, that Jim would become a vegetable. Is that what you want?"

Spock lowered his head. In a voice that was almost inaudible he said, "No." The room seemed to spin and turn a dull gray around him. All the nightmares had come true. He swallowed hard, fighting for control and closed his eyes. Part of him was dying and he was powerless to stop it. He steeled himself for what he had to ask. "How long?"

McCoy stood and walked across the room. With his back to the Vulcan, his head lowered, he answered. "A year, at best."

Spock clenched his fists. "How will it happen?"

The Doctor had been lost in thought and shook his head to clear it. "There'll be none of the symptoms so far exhibited. That's the odd thing about this type of tumor. For the next few days, he'll experience some motor dysfunction,

but that will pass and he'll be back as he always was. He'll be completely symptom free until just before the end. Then his vision will begin to fade and he'll fall into a sleep from which he simply will not wake up. There is a possibility of convulsions then, but perhaps not. There'll be no pain. Thank God for that." The physician returned to his desk and seemed to crumple into his chair. "Spock, what am I going to do? How do I tell him? How do I tell Jim that he's dying?"

Spock sat immobile, trying to make some sense of what he was hearing, but there was none. He tried to keep the pain from overwhelming him, but he could not find his voice, could not answer and his silence was evidence of the effect the Doctor's revelation had on him.

McCoy continued. "How can I tell him? All he's ever really wanted was to sail the stars. When Starfleet finds out about this, they'll either assign him to a desk job for the time left, or discharge him outright. Either way, it'll kill him faster than the tumor. He'd sooner have someone point a phaser at him and fire. He's always been too vital a man to accept waiting around for a death sentence.

The Doctor's pain filled eyes stared into Spock's. "Can you imagine what it will be like? Unable to plan on anything because he can't be sure tomorrow will be there. Alone - because dying is something nobody can really share."

Spock tried to control his raging emotions. *Alone - Jim would be alone.* "I understand, Doctor, I understand all too well," he whispered, then, "I will tell him."

McCoy stared at his hands. "I appreciate the offer, Spock, but it's my job. I'll need you there though. Jim will..." he trailed off, fascinated by his fingertips. "If only there were some way he didn't have to know."

Spock seized hopefully at those words. "Perhaps there is a way." He slowly looked up at McCoy.

The Doctor's attention was immediate and he focused on Spock, questioning. "What do you mean? He has to know."

"Will knowing change anything? There'll be no danger to the ship and I'll be here to back him up. There is really no need to tell him the truth."

McCoy sprang to his feet, towering over the seated Vulcan. "You're crazy. Do you know what you're suggesting? I'm a Doctor. I took an oath. I can't deliberately mislead a patient. Jim has a right to know."

Spock's eyes flashed. "Does he, Doctor? A right to know he has no future. You said it yourself, loosing everything will kill him faster than the tumor. Is that what your Doctor's oath means?"

The unjustified anger he had felt at Spock's suggestion fell from him and he sat down again, hands clasped in his lap.

"It's unethical, Spock. Jim is my patient," he said flatly.

"And has not the truth been withheld from patients before? It's done all the time. You yourself have done it. You have also called Jim your friend."

McCoy closed his eyes tightly. "That's not fair."

"Fair?" Spock almost spat out the words. "What's fair about it? His life is being taken away. Is it fair to deny him the fullness of whatever time he has left?"

Indecision flooded the Doctor's thoughts. "Do you realize the burden you'd be taking on?"

Spock closed his eyes and his voice was tired. "Doctor, my burden begins the day we bury him."

"If he found out we lied to him, he'd never forgive us."

"Then it will be up to us to see that he does not find out."

McCoy ached for anything that would spare his friend the agony of waiting for the end, wondering if each sunset would be his last, but though he didn't realize it, he was sparing himself as well.

"It's risky, you know. Falsifying official records is a court martial offense. If Starfleet Command should ever find out, we could be finished, our careers ruined."

"Does that matter so much?" asked Spock.

McCoy felt his throat tightening. He looked into Spock's eyes, reading the determination there. He'd always known that the Vulcan loved Kirk, but until this moment he had not realized just how much. To Spock he said, "It'll be hard, you know, facing him each day, knowing the truth and hiding it from him."

"And what about Nurse Chapel?" Spock remembered. "She assisted you in surgery. Does she know of the Captain's condition?"

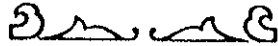
McCoy shook his head. "She didn't see the actual brain area and I wanted to do the biopsy before I told her what I found. Then I...called you first. She's a good nurse, but I think I can convince her that he's all right. People are usually anxious to hear what they want to believe anyway."

"And no one else on your staff knows?"

"No one. I ran the tests myself - couldn't bear to hear it from someone else..." McCoy's voice shook. "Just you and me, Spock... he.. he wouldn't have wanted it be general knowledge. He probably wouldn't have even wanted you to know.. to know.. if it hadn't been necessary..."

"Agreed," acknowledged the Vulcan.

McCoy reached out, clasping his friend's hand firmly, making the decision. They held fast, taking consolation from each other's presence.



When Kirk awoke the next morning, Nurse Chapel was sitting beside the bed. She smiled when she saw his eyes were open.

"Good morning, Captain. How do you feel?" she asked as she checked the monitors over the bed.

Kirk's throat was dry and his voice raspy. "Thirsty."

"The standard response," she said, smiling. "I'm afraid you can't have any water yet." She reached into a receptacle on the table and brought up some cracked ice. Reaching toward Kirk, she placed some on his tongue. "Take this, it'll help," she said. Then she went to inform Doctor McCoy that his patient was conscious.

The Doctor returned with Spock at his side. In his best doctor-patient tone of voice he said, "Well, how are we today?"

Kirk tried to lift himself on his elbow, but he was too weak and unable to make his body do what his mind directed. Falling back onto the pillow, he had to content himself with words.

His voice slurred a little, but he managed to crack a joke. "We? I wasn't aware that you were sick too."

"Very funny," said McCoy.

Kirk looked intensely at Spock and then at the Doctor's eyes, searching for a sign that everything was all right.

Spock and McCoy exchanged glances. This was the time, now or never.

McCoy smiled at Kirk, though in his heart he was crying. "It was benign, Jim. We got it all out. However, just as a precaution. I want to put you on some medication," he lied. "But there's nothing to worry about and it won't affect your performance."

McCoy had never lied to Kirk before, and he found that he had to work hard at keeping his voice steady. "For a few days, you may find some slight motor dysfunction, but that will disappear soon. You'll be as good as new."

The sigh of relief Kirk gave was audible enough to be heard across the room, but he couldn't help but notice that Spock seemed distracted. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

Though Spock saw his friend seemingly healthy and perfectly all right lying in front of him, in his mind's eye Jim Kirk was lying pale and still, eyes closed, dying. The sound of the Captain's voice jolted him back to reality. "No, nothing wrong. I'm just a bit fatigued."

"And you admit it?" Kirk was surprised, for the Vulcan usually had to be forced into resting.

"And well he should be," interjected McCoy. "He hasn't slept in two days. He spent all of last night sitting by your bed."

Kirk grinned. "Trying to make yourself sick, too?" he asked in mock sternness, but his voice was tender.

Spock pretended to look insulted. "Of course not. I merely stayed to see to it that Doctor McCoy did his job correctly."

McCoy shot the Vulcan a warning look, but said nothing.

"Now I can see that you are in no need of rescue, I will return to my duties." Spock started to leave and had taken a few steps when McCoy recovered his wits.

"Hold it right there, Mister," he ordered.

Spock came to a dead stop in surprise and turned. "What is it now, Doctor?"

"You are not returning to duty. Oh, no. You're going to your quarters and get some sleep. That is not a request, that is a medical order."

The First Officer looked to Kirk for help, but the Captain had drifted off to sleep. Spock shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, Doctor." Then he left.

McCoy checked the monitors over the Captain's bed once again, and satisfied with what he saw, allowed himself to relax a little. Kirk opened his eyes.

The Doctor smiled down at him for a moment, then turned serious. "I want you to lie quietly. No undue exertion. You may have visitors later."

"How long do I have to stay here?"

"Well now, that depends on you. If you cooperate and do as you're told, you'll be back on duty in a week. Otherwise..."

Weakly, Kirk put a hand in mock defeat. "I'll be good, I'll be good."

"Sure you will," replied McCoy with a grin, "and I believe in the good fairy too."

In his quarters, Spock lay awake, wondering how he was going to get through the ordeal ahead. *I must accept it. It is illogical to deny it...to refuse to face reality. Logic dictates I must... I must resign myself to the death of one who has become more than a brother. The human heart he taught me to accept cries for him, and for myself, and what I will be...when he is.. gone.*

His thoughts were jumbled, confused. If the deception were to be successful, then no hint of what he felt, what he feared must be externalized. He had to find a way to control his fears. Suddenly, the enormity of the situation gripped him and he began to shake. He rose and walked to the firepot in the corner of his room. Closing his eyes, he focused his thoughts on a time when as a child, his father first taught him the precepts of meditation and how it could help control emotion. Slowly step by step, he went through the procedures as though he were still a child. It did not help.



*I*n the months that followed Spock found himself becoming increasingly protective of Kirk. He realized what he was doing, but was unable to stop. At times, emotions damned for so long, threatened to overwhelm him, forcing him to retreat to his quarters for meditation in an attempt to maintain control. It became more difficult each day that passed.

His relationship with McCoy underwent a change. Their shared secret drew them closer, bringing them to a new understanding of each other. Spock felt keenly McCoy's deep hurt at being unable to help his friend, of having to just stand by. He knew that the Doctor was worried about him as well and tried to allay his fears.

Spock seemed to acquire a new softness, seeming to have at last come to terms with his dual nature. He maintained his shields however, for the approaching tragedy threatened to drown him.

Day by day, he grew closer to his friend. The unspoken bond between them was such that they could almost anticipate each other's thoughts and actions. But as Spock watched Kirk's life slowly draw to a close, he died each day a little. Six months later the Enterprise was finally headed for orbital repairs at Starbase Ten and a two week leave for all personnel. The ship would be locked in orbit and a maintenance crew beamed up. A few of the regular crew would remain. As Kirk, Spock, and McCoy stepped to the transportor platform, the Captain continued his campaign to overcome the Scotsman's reluctance to leave his engines in the hands of someone else. He was still trying to persuade Scott to come along when the transportor was activated and the shimmering effect began, cutting off his words. Scott smiled as they disappeared and then went back to his 'bairns'.



*T*he three men materialized on the outskirts of the town, near the main entrance to the reserve. They were greeted by the ranger, Mr. Clark. He stepped forward and extended his hand. "Gentlemen, I've been expecting you. I have your gear and horses ready. I trust you are cognizant of the regulations concerning camping here?"

"Yes, of course," replied Kirk earnestly, impatient to get started. Weapons are only for defense." Spock and McCoy exchanged tolerant glances, accepting their friend's enthusiasm.

A short time later, they were on their way.

They rode in silence for most of the afternoon, enjoying the scenery. It was a beautiful day, hardly a cloud in the sky, the air crisp and clear. In the distance they could hear the sound of animals at feeding time.

McCoy watched an eagle soar high over the distant hills. Quiet surrounded them and the Doctor found that he could take the time to appreciate the simple beauty of a bird in flight. *So beautiful...graceful. They spend their lives in flight, and when they can no longer spread their wings against the sky, they die. In a way, Jim is like that bird. A winged creature who lived only for the glory of flight.* He felt a lump rise in his throat. There were so few pleasant moments these days when he felt that he had time for anything. Kirk was riding ahead of him, and he watched his friend sitting tall and straight, as though he were a part of the animal he rode. *The time goes so swiftly. Soon it will all be gone.*

Kirk and Spock rode side by side, not speaking for the most part. Words had become unnecessary for the two men. They had no need to speak, their knowledge of each other was so great, their friendship so close that words were redundant.

As they rode further into the hills, and the shadows lengthened, they began to look for a good campsite. They finally chose a place on a cliff overlooking a valley, beyond which were mountains as far as the eye could see.

Spock had brought his lyre along and after dinner, began to play. The strains of the music floated through the night air, echoing back to them. It had a relaxing effect and soon Kirk and McCoy were singing along. They didn't know many Vulcan songs, but Spock had a rather extensive knowledge of old Earth folk music and soon they had an old fashioned songfest going.

When Spock awoke the next morning, the sun had not yet risen. He laid on the hard ground facing Kirk, watching him sleep. A lock of hair had fallen over one eye, and an intense grief washed through the Vulcan. He reached out a hand and gently brushed Kirk's hair from his face, then softly traced a line down the cheek. The human stirred in his sleep. Unwanted tears stung the Vulcan's eyes and he blinked them back, composing himself for the day ahead.

When the first signs of the dawn came, he awakened the others, not wanting them to miss the sunrise. As they watched, the golden orb that was the sun rose over the mountains creating a kaleidoscope of colors in the sky, and shadows on the land that left them speechless.

Kirk felt completely at peace. He thought to himself that if he had the power to stop time in its tracks, this would be the time.



Their vacation seemed to pass in a haze, one day sliding calmly into the next. They spoke rarely during the day, content to just ride, explore the countryside, and be together. At fireside in the evenings, they talked about past events and future dreams or told tall stories. Paul Bunyon and his giant blue bull was a favorite of Kirk's. He had been raised on them, and found the art of telling a tall story fascinating. He and McCoy vied with each other to tell the most outlandish stories, while Spock watched and listened, fascinated.

But each time the Captain began to talk about the future, they tried to steer the conversation in another direction, for it hurt to hear him tell of his hopes and the plans he'd made. He had it so very carefully worked out, what he would do after retirement.

"Yes sir, when I retire, say in about 60 or so years, I know just where I'm going and what I'm going to do," said Kirk. "Now how many people do you know who can say that?"

"Not many," acknowledged McCoy.

"Ever driven down the coast highway between Los Angeles and San Francisco?"

"Can't say that I have."

Kirk sat up, pulling his legs to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. There's a place there called Big Sur. One of the most beautiful coastlines on Earth. I bought a house on the ocean there years ago."

Spock had been watching the Captain's face as he talked about his plans. In another time, Kirk would have been a sailor, for he loved the sea. He wondered momentarily if they were right in not telling him, for they were in fact cheating him out of doing the things he wanted to do later in life. If he knew the truth, he might yet be able to do some of them. It was a line of thought that could be maddening, but a course of action had been decided upon and once done, there was no turning back. *It's too late now for regrets.* His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Kirk's voice.

"Spock, are you all right?" He had noticed that the Vulcan seemed distracted.

Spock put his doubts aside. "Quite all right. I was just thinking."

Kirk grinned. "About anything in particular?"

The Vulcan shook his head. "Just that it has been a very enjoyable leave. A pity it ends soon."

Kirk was surprised. It wasn't like Spock to admit to enjoying anything and to profess a wish that it continue was unheard of.

"Emotion, Spock?" McCoy grinned from ear to ear.

The First Officer arched his eyebrows and inclined his head. "It would be illogical to deny the feeling, even for a Vulcan."

Kirk was pleased at the exchange. It wasn't much of a battle of wits, but it would do until something better came along. He couldn't quite put his finger on when it had happened or why, but he had noticed recently that they no longer engaged in the back and forth bantering they used to. He missed it, for he had enjoyed playing the referee. Several times he had even tried to provoke them, but it was no use. They couldn't be baited. He didn't understand it.

That evening had a special quality to it. The stars shone even more brightly, more beautifully than usual. The three friends lay on their backs on the soft earth and watched the sky, picking out the constellations. Spock knew the legends behind the naming of each one and was not reluctant to expound on the subject. They talked of making this kind of trip again.



The next few days went swiftly, too swiftly. While Spock and McCoy packed up the camping equipment for the last time, the Captain explored a cave he had found the night before. It was an immensely deep cave with walls that were luminescent. He was about fifty feet in when suddenly, from behind a large outcropping of rock, a huge creature appeared. Over eight feet tall, covered from head to toe with fur, it towered over Kirk, menacingly. He wished fervently that he hadn't left his phaser at the campsite.

As the creature inched towards him Kirk began to step backward slowly, trying not to make any distracting moves. Suddenly, without warning, the creature sprang forward. The mouth of the cave was still more than twenty feet away. There was no way Kirk could make it out in time, but he tried.

Turning to run, he yelled, "Spock, McCoy, help!" He stumbled and fell, striking his head. The last thing he saw before losing consciousness was the creature bending over him.

Though the cave was some distance from the campsite, the walls had acted as an amplifier, allowing Spock and McCoy to hear the cry for help quite clearly. They came on a run, arriving to see the animal ready to strike, long sharp claws ready to tear into Kirk. Spock fired his phaser, but it had no effect on the creature. He couldn't set it to the kill cycle, for the Captain was too close and would have been hit as well. Spock advanced toward the creature, drawing it's attention.



When Kirk awoke, he was back on the Enterprise in sickbay. Unsure of where he was, what had happened, he looked around. Doctor McCoy's attention was on the next bed. Kirk tried to sit up, but his head felt as though there were jackhammers going at full vibration inside and he fell against the pillow. He couldn't remember how he had gotten there. The last thing he remembered was a gigantic animal bending over him.

McCoy heard him moving around and turned, allowing the Captain to see who was in the bed. It was Spock.

Alarmed, Kirk asked, "What's wrong with him?"

McCoy hesitated at first, then reached toward Kirk, placing his hands on the Captain's shoulders to buffer the words.

"The phaser stun had no effect on the animal and Spock could not use the kill cycle because of the cramped quarters. It would have caught you as well. He had to depend on his own strength. He managed to reach the neck, render it unconscious but... not before he was attacked. The animal's fangs secreted poison." His voice was ragged.

Kirk pushed the Doctor's arms away and swinging his legs over the side of the bed, stood up. His legs were like rubber and his head was spinning, but he had to get to Spock.

McCoy took his arm, supporting him and helped the Captain to Spock's side. Normal color gone, sweat covering his body, the Vulcan lay like a broken doll. There were claw marks on his arms, the only visible evidence of injury. Kirk was frightened.

"How bad?"

"The poison has spread through his system," McCoy began.

"You have the antidote," Kirk insisted.

"I'm afraid not," replied McCoy dully. "I haven't been able to..."

The implication of the Doctor's words angered the Captain and he grabbed McCoy's arm. "I don't believe it. He can't be dying. You have to do something." Kirk's voice rose in intensity. "Don't just stand there. Do something."

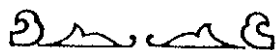
McCoy closed his hand over the Captain's, not sure what he could say. He hung his head, unwilling to trust words.

The anger in Kirk faded just as quickly as it had flared up. "I'm sorry, Bones. I know you're doing all you can. Isn't there anything else you can...."

Taking Kirk by the shoulders, McCoy pushed him into a chair. "I am but it's spreading so fast. I'm not sure we'll have enough time."

The Captain buried his head in his hands, McCoy's voice barely penetrating his grief.

"Jim, get back in bed. You're in no condition to be up. I'll keep trying."



With Nurse Chapel's and the labs help, McCoy continued the search for an antidote. Each failure, each unsuccessful attempt brought closer the inevitable. Finally, there were no more tests left to try. Christine Chapel

ran from the room in tears, leaving McCoy staring helplessly at his last experiment.



Kirk had refused to go back to his own bed, insisting on sitting with Spock. The dread grew as hour after hour - too long, - yet all too short- the Vulcan's life signs faded. Never had Kirk felt so helpless. The sound of movement from the bed brought him back to reality and he jumped from the chair, ignoring the pain in his temple. Spock's eyes had opened and they slowly focused on Kirk.

The pain killers McCoy had administered kept Spock on the edge of consciousness and he was only dimly aware of Kirk's presence. He tried to speak, but his lips were cracked and parched, his throat dry.

McCoy entered the room, checking the monitors, hoping against hope that there was some change for the better, but there was none. Kirk glanced at the Doctor, but his eyes met resignation.

Kirk gently wiped the perspiration from Spock's face, caressing each line. *So much a part of me. I can't lose him.*

McCoy stood silently by, throat tightening, composure threatening to break.

"Jim?" A voice, weak but audible came from the bed. Spock's eyes were fully focused now and he smiled, for when he had pulled the creature off the Captain, he hadn't known whether his friend was dead or alive. He felt a great weight slip from his heart.

Kirk took his hand. "Lie still, don't talk."

Spock's eyes filled with love and understanding. "I'll wait for you, Jim, in the morning." Then his eyes closed, his arm went limp.

Stricken, Kirk looked up to see the life readings fall to zero. "Bones," he said through clenched teeth, but the Doctor shook his head.

Kirk choked back the anguished cry that threatened to escape from him and lifting his friend's hand, gently brushed his lips against the still warm flesh. It was like all the bad dreams he'd ever had as a child, but now there was no one to tell him they weren't real. He couldn't believe this was happening. Yesterday, everything had been fine, now this.... Closing his eyes, he blinked back the tears and stood for several minutes, Spock's hand clasped tightly in his own. Then he let go, turned sharply and took a few steps toward the door. A wave of dizziness swept through him and he blacked out.



When he came to, it was hours later. The concussion he had suffered, combined with the shock of Spock's death had taken its toll. His mind was fuzzy and he couldn't remember what had happened. All he could recall was

seeing the Vulcan lying on the bed next to him, but when he looked now, it was empty. *Just a dream.*

Turning his head, he saw McCoy coming towards him. Bewildered, and still a little dazed, he asked weakly, "Where's Spock?"

McCoy was startled and after a slight hesitation was about to answer, but then Kirk noticed Nurse Chapel at the foot of the bed, her face streaked as though she had been crying.

Suddenly images of Spock came into his mind, of the Vulcan lying hurt and something worse... Kirk bolted upright in bed as the burning memory returned and a sharp knife slashed through his midsection. "He's... d ... dead, isn't he, Bones?"

McCoy nodded slowly, eyes filled with pain. Kirk sank back onto the bed and turning, buried his face in the pillow.

McCoy put a comforting hand on Kirk's shoulder. At the touch, Kirk looked around at the Doctor, then sat up. McCoy reached to embrace his friend, but there was no response. The Captain seemed to look through him as though he weren't there.

The loneliness that McCoy had felt at time, the sense of being outside looking in, returned. Grief assailed him, for the loss just encountered and the one soon to come. Shoulders hunched, he left Kirk in solitude.



The next few days were hell for both of them. As the Captain, it was Kirk's duty to inform the rest of the crew and it was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do. He walked through the next two days in a haze, not noticing anything. The ship had left orbit and now proceeded toward their station patrolling the neutral zone. Spock's body would be buried enroute, in the traditional manner of beaming it into space in a wide dispersement pattern. By the time the burial was to take place, the crushing grief Kirk felt had dulled somewhat, leaving him numb. Except for the time he was required on the bridge, he stayed in his quarters seeing no one. As always when he was troubled, he sought refuge in the music he loved, but the peace it had always brought to his mind in the past did not come. This was a grief beyond help.

When the time came for the burial ceremony, he wasn't sure he could handle it, but it was a duty he couldn't delegate. Everyone was waiting for him in the transporter room. He straightened his shoulders and swallowed hard, trying to draw from some deep inner well, the needed courage. Only then did he allow himself to move into the field that would work the automatic doors.

The room was crowded. Chief Kyle and Commander Scott were at the control console, Sulu and Chekov on either side. Lieutenant Uhura stood off to one side, supporting Christine Chapel who looked on the verge of collapse. An honor guard of six flanked the platform. They all waited expectantly for the Captain. The change in his appearance shocked them. He moved slowly, his face drawn, his shoulders hunched.

McCoy stepped forward. "Jim," he said sympathetically.

Kirk forced a weak smile. His mind churned with a myriad of thoughts, none of which were going to help him get through the ordeal ahead.

Commander Scott brought everyone present to attention and stepped back. Kirk moved to the center of the room.

"Commander Spock died heroically, saving another's life. That it was mine he saved, makes this even harder. He was a valued member of this crew." His voice dropped to a whisper.

"And he was a friend. Not just to me, but to everyone here, to every member of this crew. This was not the first time he had risked his life. Many times in the past he'd done the same thing. He never thought twice of the hazards involved, just plunged ahead and did what had to be done.

His voice faltered, and lowering his head, stopped. There was a long silence as he composed himself, then he continued, giving a eulogy that would have embarrassed the Vulcan had he been there.

There were occasional intakes of breath as crewmembers attempted to keep themselves from breaking down. Except for Nurse Chapel, they managed. She stood stiffly throughout the entire ceremony, tears streaming down her face. Once or twice Kirk glanced over at her. He knew that Spock had never been able to return the love she had for him, and he felt a stab of pain at the woman's grief. He didn't know how he managed to finish, but finally he nodded to Scott.

"Attention," snapped the engineer.

The honor guard presented arms as two crewmen brought the body of the Vulcan in and laid it gently on the transportor platform. For the last time, Kirk gazed at the face of his friend.

"Good-bye Spock," he said softly under his breath.

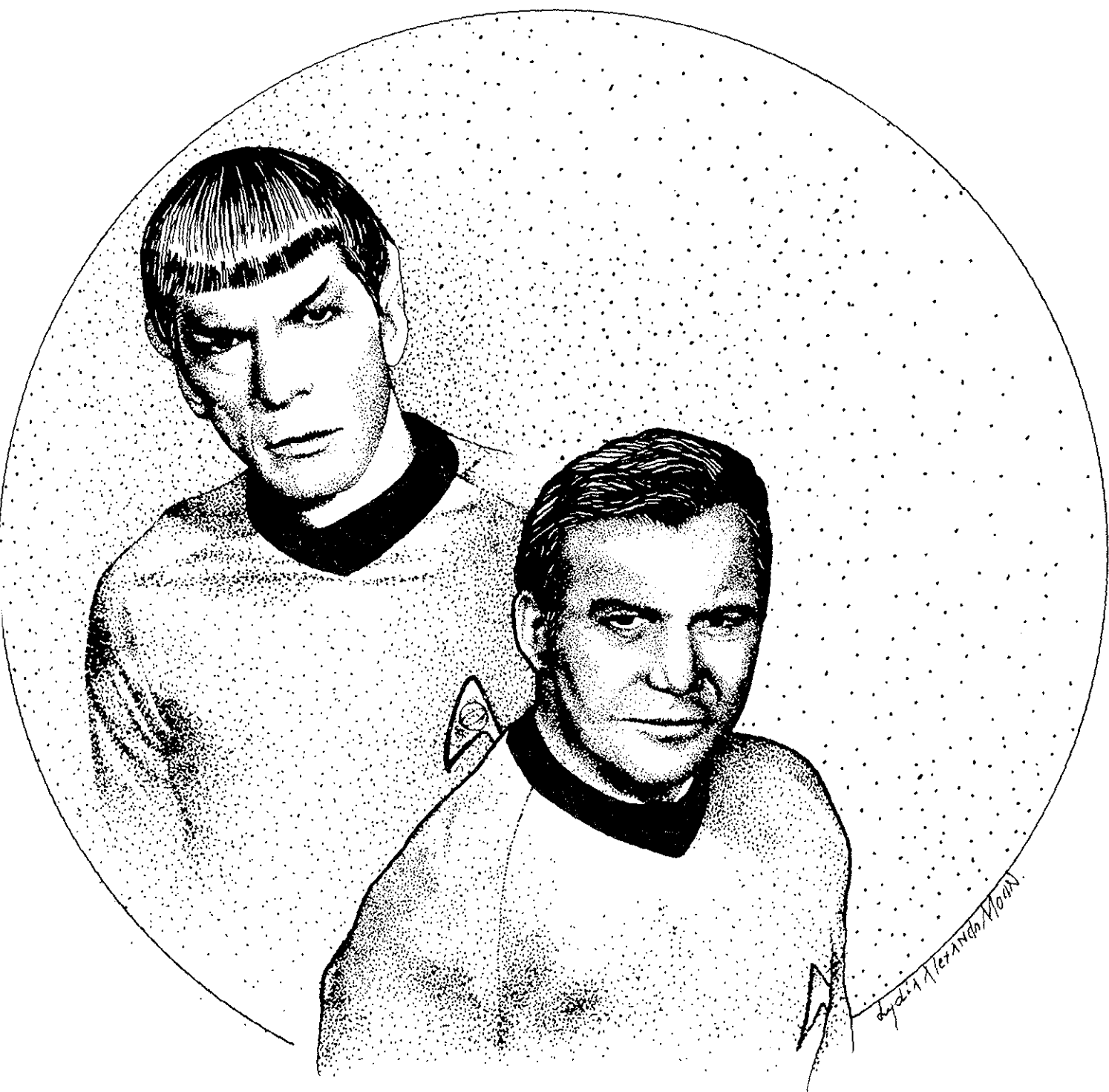
The stillness of the room, broken only by Nurse Chapel's sobbing, made the whole affair seem like a dream. Kirk looked around at the faces staring into dead air, unshed tears stinging his eyes.

He drew himself up stiffly. "Energize," he ordered, his voice breaking.

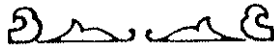
As the room full of people watched, the whine of the transportor grew and Spock's body shimmered into atoms and was gone. Slowly the room emptied, until only Kirk and McCoy were left. The Captain's gaze was fixed on the empty platform, where only a few moments before he had watched his friend disappear for the last time. The Doctor gently laid a hand on Kirk's shoulder. The Captain shivered at the touch.

"Jim?"

Kirk turned. His hazel eyes were dry, but filled with such pain that it cut through McCoy's heart to look into them. Still in a daze, he let the



Doctor guide him from the room. As the door slid shut behind them, Kirk strained to look back.



For almost a week McCoy let the grief of Spock's death run its course. He never would have admitted it before, but he cared deeply for the Vulcan. The hurt he had been through in his marriage long ago had resulted in an emotional wall, one he rarely lowered. In a way, he and Spock had been alike, both afraid of a commitment. Now it was too late. The constant bickering had been his way of keeping distance between himself and rejection, but it hadn't worked that way. It had not stopped his heart from loving. *Why do we always wait until it's too late before we admit to ourselves that we care? I hope to God that Spock knew I cared.*

Soon he realized that the Vulcan's death presented another problem. Through the grief he felt for Spock came the certainty that now Kirk had to be told the truth of his illness. He cursed himself for the lie they had been living. He'd known it was wrong, but went along with it because he lacked the courage to do otherwise, and now the time for payment was here. A wave of panic gripped him, a feeling of catastrophe. Each day he put it off, it became harder. Finally, he steeled himself for the ordeal, terrified of Kirk's reaction, unsure for once of what it would be.

It was the Captain's off duty hours and thinking that Kirk would be in his quarters, McCoy headed there, but the buzzer went unanswered. He used the override switch to enter and wait. Too restless and uneasy to sit down, he wandered about picking up objects, books, inspecting them.

He noticed a picture on the shelf behind the bed. A gold frame circled a likeness of a very young boy and a very large animal. The child was a Vulcan, a serious expression on his face and a stranglehold on the animal. McCoy realized that it was Spock and a smile lit his face briefly, then faded. Tears stung his eyes and he tore his gaze from it and sank heavily onto the bed.

The door sliding open drew his attention. Kirk entered, surprised to see the Doctor waiting.

"What is it, Bones?" Kirk asked as he sat down.

"I have to talk to you, Jim."

"Can't it wait? I'm a little tired."

McCoy shook his head. "It's important."

Kirk sighed and motioned him to a chair.

McCoy crossed to sit opposite the Captain. Now that he was here, now that the moment had come, he couldn't bring himself to say the words. He stumbled around for several minutes, giving Kirk reports on trivial matters that really were not important. Several times he started to bring up the subject, each time backing off in fear. Kirk became increasingly impatient.

"Come on, Bones. If that's all you've come for, I'd like to get some sleep. Those things will keep."

McCoy took a deep breath, and closing his eyes momentarily began. "It's something I should have told you some time ago. The operation...I performed on you...."

"What about it?" asked Kirk in a puzzled voice.

McCoy's voice was hesitant. "I removed the tumor all right, but it was..."

Kirk leaned towards him. "Was what?"

McCoy's fists clenched tightly, and his fingernails dug into his flesh. "Malignant."

Kirk felt a twinge of apprehension at the ugly word. "And you didn't tell me. Why?"

McCoy shifted position, heartsick at what he was doing. *He trusted me and I let him down.*

Kirk's eyes were questioning as he waited for an answer. "Why are you telling me now? I don't understand." The Doctor's hesitancy made him suspicious.

"You didn't get it all, did you?"

The moment had come and McCoy paused. *Regrets are the bitterest of things. It's even harder now, than it would have been then. Now on top of losing Spock he has to hear this.*

"I couldn't. It was too involved." He tried to keep his voice natural, but wasn't quite successful.

"Does that mean you must operate again?" Kirk was confused, still not comprehending what the Doctor was saying.

McCoy took a deep breath and continued. "Jim, I can't. There's no second chance." He lost his battle to remain in control. "A few months... perhaps as many as six." The words spoken, McCoy repressed an urge to vomit, and steeled himself for Kirk's reaction. He met his friend's gaze looking for understanding, but none came.

Kirk's expression became hard, unreachable. He glared at the Doctor. "I don't believe you. It can't be true."

"How I wish it weren't." McCoy could make it no easier. Now too late, he had to make Kirk see the truth.

Kirk stared, as if he were suddenly seeing the Doctor for the first time. He walked across the room, standing with his back to McCoy for several minutes, conflicting emotions at work within him. There was an eerie silence as McCoy sat, waiting tensely.

Then Kirk turned, his face contorted with rage. He lashed out at the Doctor, savagely pulling him from the chair. "What were you going to do? Wait until I was a vegetable and unable to function at all before you told me?"

"Jim, you will not become a vegetable," said McCoy as he covered the Captain's hand with his own, finding the strength to explain. "There'll be no symptoms until... the end. It's a rare type of tumor. You'll be able to function normally....."

Kirk pushed him away. "What right did you have? It's my life, not yours. I had a right to know." His anger was growing and letting go of McCoy, he began pacing the floor.

McCoy went to him, placing a conciliatory hand on his shoulder, but the Captain moved away, leaving the Doctor desperately trying to think of a way to make him understand.

"How could you do it?" shouted Kirk. "Why?"

McCoy started to reply, but the Captain cut him off. "Never mind, I don't want to hear excuses. You lied to me."

McCoy tried again. "Jim, you must listen to me, please. Don't you think I know I was wrong? I know this isn't easy for you to accept. If there were any other way... if only there were... I'd take it."

Kirk's eyes seemed to burn through the Doctor. "Well, you did just that, didn't you?"

"At the time, there seemed to be nothing to be gained by telling you."

"It was not your right to decide that."

"No, it wasn't." McCoy rubbed a hand over his eyes. *One error in judgement.* He'd known it was wrong when he did it, but he was weak, afraid. He tried to justify to himself what he had done, but couldn't. He'd taken the easy way out, or what seemed the easy way out; now the price of his cowardice was awfully high. All the reasons, all the excuses his mind had built up seemed far too inadequate. There were no words to convince his friend.

"You bet it wasn't," Kirk spat out. "Did you think I was a child, unable to take care of myself? That I couldn't handle the truth? How dare you!"

"Jim, it wasn't that," McCoy pleaded. "I know what you're capable of. Maybe it was for myself. I couldn't face it. I'm sorry."

"It's too late for sorry, Doctor, and I use the title loosely."

"Maybe, but if you had known, nothing would have changed. I can't do any more than I could have then."

"That doesn't matter. My God, now you tell me. Why? Feeling guilty Doctor? Is that why you're letting me in on the little secret now? Sorry, about this, but you're going to pack it in in six months."

"That's not why," McCoy started, watching Kirk, praying for an end to this agony.

Kirk turned from the Doctor, face contorted. "God... six months, that's funny." He laughed bitterly.

McCoy was alarmed, but all he could do was stand by in silence.

"This is really the kicker. Got to hand it to you. You have great timing. So soon after Spock...." Abruptly his eyes became slits. All at once, the manner of Spock's death dawned on him. His friend had died saving a man who would be dead in a few months. Kirk faced the Doctor, staring him down, eyes filled with resentment, flashing with anger. He lashed out at him.

"*You killed Spock.* If you had told him the truth, he'd still be alive." He drew back his arm and for a moment, McCoy thought he was going to hit him, then Kirk turned and slammed his fist against the wall. "*You murdered Spock.*"

Startled by the abrupt change in attitude, McCoy backed up a few feet. He had not anticipated, was not prepared for this reaction.

Kirk continued his harangue as he paced the room. "You son of a bitch, how could you do it? Didn't you stop to think at all?" He waved his arms angrily. "I knew you never understood Spock, but I never would have believed you capable of...."

McCoy stared wide eyed in despair at the outpouring and died inside. His shock at Kirk's accusation left him speechless, as Kirk continued to pace aimlessly about the cabin, looked betrayed and on the edge of collapse.

McCoy tried to interrupt, to get a word in. "Jim, please listen."

Kirk whirled. "Listen? To what? More lies, more excuses? I don't want to hear them."

"Spock knew," McCoy blurted out, instantly regretting the words.

Kirk stopped in mid-stride, stunned. His face a mixture of surprise, anger and disbelief, he stood motionless. "I don't believe you."

"It's true," McCoy said, unable to back down now. "He knew right from the beginning."

Kirk sagged. The life seemed to flow from him. He didn't want to believe it, but somehow sensed that it was true. He sat on the bed and buried his head in his hands.

McCoy went to him, putting a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Try to understand, we were only trying to help, to protect you," he said pleading.

Kirk looked up, eyes tortured. "Why did he do it? Why did he save me, when he knew I was going to die anyway? He shouldn't have died." For a moment he seemed so broken that McCoy was terrified. Then the anger returned abruptly and he sprang from the bed, once again pacing the floor like a caged animal. Each attempt of the Doctor to reach him, brought rebuffs and McCoy began to worry that the Captain would do something foolish. He stalled for time, hoping that the anger would calm. He ignored each order to leave, inviting even more anger, but finally, he accepted that he could do no more at this time.

Kirk's voice was edged with fury. "I'll see you pay for this, Doctor. You've falsified medical records for one thing. I have nothing more to say."

McCoy was crushed by the ice in Kirk's voice. He once again put out a hand to Kirk, then dropped it to his side in resignation.

The Captain turned his back on the man who had been a friend only a short time before. "Get out. Don't come back. Ever."

McCoy turned to leave. As the door slid open he hesitated, afraid to go, unable to stay. Kirk wouldn't listen to him.

When the door closed, Kirk spun around. Tears streaming down his face, he picked up the nearest available object and hurled it across the room. Spock's picture shattered and fell to the floor. He leaned back and slid down the wall.

"Damn you, McCoy. Damn you, to hell," he said sobbing. He buried his head in his knees. *Spock, why?*

McCoy stayed in the corridor outside the Captain's quarters for some time, unwilling to go any farther should Kirk need him. As he paced the floor, he wished he knew what was going on in Kirk's mind. Perhaps, he thought, someone else might be able to talk to him.

McCoy found himself in front of Commander Scott's door, hopefully pressing the buzzer. In a few seconds, the door slid open. Scott seemed surprised to see him.

"Doctor?" The Engineer appeared to be gauging him and McCoy realized he must look rather shaken.

"Do you mind if I come in, Scotty?"

Scott stood back to let him pass.

"Not at all, Leonard, but ye look like the divil's own. Let me pour ye a drink." He followed him into the room and crossed to set out a glass and fill it with an amber liquid.

McCoy took the glass gratefully and putting it to his lips, downed the scotch in one swallow. Scott's eyebrows shot up in surprise.

"What's wrong?" asked the engineer.

McCoy wanted to tell him, but he knew instinctively that Kirk would not want him to know, so he told a half truth. "I'm worried about Jim. He's been driving himself too hard lately. He's overworked, irritated and on top of that, grieving over Spock. I can't reach him, he won't listen to me."

Scott nodded in understanding. He knew how close Spock had been to Kirk. "Now Doctor, dinna ye worry. I'll look in on him. I think you should get some rest yourself. Ye look as though ye need it."

"Thanks Scotty, I appreciate it." When the Doctor left Scott's quarters, he made his way to his own, not seeming to notice passing crewmembers. The ship seemed empty. The shock of Kirk's reaction, and the knowledge that the Captain blamed him for Spock's death totally swamped his thoughts. *I lost a friend in a way worse than death.*



True to his word, Scott checked on the Captain. Kirk sat on the edge of his bed, staring at the wall opposite, seemingly oblivious to Scott's entrance.

Scott spoke hesitantly. "Captain?"

Kirk looked up slowly. The anger and pain reflected in his eyes startled Scott, and his heart went out to the young Captain. The whole crew missed Spock, but Kirk would feel his loss even deeper. And yet Scott sensed that there was more than Spock's death that was tearing him apart.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Scott?" Kirk's voice was angry.

Scott cleared his throat. "I was just goin' down to the Rec Room and wondered if ye'd care to join me."

Kirk stared at him, the hostile look in his eyes slowly fading. "I... thanks, but no. I just want to be left alone."

The engineer stayed a few minutes, not wanting Kirk to be alone, but finally moved to leave.

At the door, Scott paused. "There's a bottle of Scotch in my cabin, Jim, and I've a good ear for listen'n. I wouldna mind the company - anytime - if you've a need to talk."

"Thanks, Scotty, you may be sorry you offered." His voice was tired.

Scott shook his head. "I think not. Good-night, Sir."

The door slid open and Scott looked back as he left. Kirk had returned to staring at the wall.

Kirk didn't appear outside his cabin for more than twenty four hours. He saw no one, spoke to no one, other than to say that he didn't want to be disturbed unless it was an emergency. The implications of what McCoy had told him had yet to sink in, overshadowed as it was by the lies, by the knowledge that McCoy had kept the truth from him and worse, that Spock had. *I'll never forgive them.*

For the next few days, he pointedly ignored McCoy, forbidding him to come to the bridge unless called. He still had not decided what to do about the false records, even though he had as much threatened to file formal charges.

Kirk finally decided to see McCoy, and summoned him to the briefing room. He sat stiffly at the head of the table, eyes straight ahead, mouth set in determination, as the Doctor entered the room.

"Sit down," ordered Kirk.

McCoy eased himself into the chair, and folded his hands, waiting in silence.

Kirk's voice was bitter, but controlled. "I have decided not to press charges, but that doesn't mean that anything has changed. Much as I dislike it, you are still the Doctor... for the time being." He closed his eyes, rubbing the exhaustion from them. "Now, I want to know exactly what is going to happen to me. Don't attempt to sugarcoat the truth. I'm not a child," he said sarcastically, his manner hiding the fear, the pain of betrayal. His eyes bore into the Doctor's, warning him, daring him to say anything out of line.

McCoy stared at him for a minute, then began. When he had finished, there was silence as Kirk endeavored to absorb it all.

Kirk sat motionless, his eyes fixed on a point beyond the Doctor, feeling himself drowning in a sea of confusion. McCoy's voice broke through his thoughts.

"Jim, what are you going to do now?"

"I haven't decided yet. In any case, that's my concern, not yours. Clear?"

McCoy slumped in his seat. "Perfectly."

There was a long pause, then the Doctor spoke. "Is that all?"

"That's all, you're dismissed."

McCoy rose and started for the door. Kirk bent his head to the papers on the table. He heard the door slide open, and McCoy hesitate on the threshold.

"Jim, I did what I thought was right, what I had to do."

Kirk continued to play with the papers until he heard the door slide shut. Then he looked up, surveying the empty room. Putting his elbows on the table, he buried his head in his hands.

Kirk could not sleep that night. Only a short time ago the thought of leaving the Enterprise would have been painful, but not now. Memories of Spock assailed him, making each waking moment a torment. Spock had lied and he hated him for it. He wanted to forget him, but couldn't stop missing him. Nothing mattered anymore, not even the ship. All he wanted to do was to be left alone and he determined to go back to Earth; perhaps there he could find some measure of peace. The night passed slowly, seeming to last forever. He thought of taking a sleeping pill, but that would have meant going to sickbay, and McCoy had the graveyard shift. The next morning he informed Starfleet Command of his illness and received permission to return to Earthbase, there to turn the ship over to another Captain. He wondered briefly who it would be, and discovered that he didn't care. He was beginning to feel that the end would be a welcome release. The news of his resignation swept through the ship like wildfire. No official reason had been given the crew, and rumors abounded.



McCoy made one last effort to get through to Kirk, coming to the Captain's quarters the night before they were to reach Earth orbit. The Captain was not pleased to see him. He was lying on the bed, lights dimmed, when the Doctor walked in. He turned his head at the sound of the door opening to see McCoy framed by the light from the corridor. As the door closed, he rose, angry.

"You don't take orders well, do you Mister?" he said furiously. "I ordered you to stay away from me." He stood beside the bed, hands clenched. "Perhaps I did not make myself clear. Is that it?"

McCoy shook his head. "I was concerned. It was my duty to investigate."

Kirk turned from him and striding to his desk, sat down, beginning to shift the papers around on it. "Very well, you investigated. Duty is satisfied. Now leave," he said coldly.

McCoy's eyes bore into the Captain's until Kirk broke the connection. No more words passed between them, but the barely suppressed hostility from Kirk gave McCoy no space in which to reach him. He left.

When he had gone, Kirk slumped, dropping the papers he had been holding to the floor. Hands still clenched, he pressed them to his eyes, trying to stop the tears from coming. It didn't work. Against his will, he wept bitterly.

Several days later, after a final debriefing, he found himself in civilian clothing. The trip from Starfleet headquarters in San Francisco to his home on the coast at Big Sur, California did not take long. Stepping from the air car in front of his house, he surveyed his new surroundings. The house was a one story modern structure, made of stone and glass. After leaving the bags in his bedroom, he wandered through the house, renewing his acquaintance with it. It was not the homecoming he had always planned. There were no friends with whom to enjoy it, or show it off to. He went for a walk on the beach. The sun was going down, the sky growing dark. *The saddest part of the day, the dying of the light.*

Sleep came easily that first night, for the long trip and emotional strain had exhausted him. Sleep however, brought nightmares and when he awoke, he was bathed in sweat. He sat up, startled, unsure of where he was. The sun was coming up, filling the room with light as his mind cleared.

Some time passed before he found the will to move and face the day. The house, the beach, were all as he remembered, but there was no peace for him. None of the serene beauty he had known in this place could be found. His constant ache made the world seem colorless.

Unable to summon the energy to do anything, he spent the days sitting on the beach staring out to the sea, not really focusing on it. Music played constantly from the house, but it didn't help calm him as it once did. He played it only because he could not stand the silence.

Some nights when sleep wouldn't come, he sat on the sand staring at the stars, remembering what used to be. Betrayed by his own mind, memories of Spock and McCoy crept through his thoughts, keeping alive the hurt. The emotional pressures were building and he felt as if he would come apart.



*W*Weeks passed, the days seeming to blend, sliding one into the other until there was nothing to distinguish them. Anger slowly drained away, leaving in its wake an empty loneliness. The self imposed solitude he maintained only served to heighten the despair, making each waking moment hell.

Finally, the night came when, unable to sleep and too restless just to sit on the beach, he began to walk along the shore, wading in the surf, as the music drifted down from the house. The sounds of the sea were hypnotic, the cool water soothing. He watched as the surf broke up into white foam on the sand. The lilting notes of the Blue Danube crept through the night air and he found himself swaying to the melody, emotion stilled, mind calm. As he watched the stars shining high in the clear night sky, a sense of purpose crept slowly into his thoughts.

He looked back at the house, lights blazing within. Then, eyes fixed on the horizon, he straightened his back and began to walk deeper into the

the surf, not stopping until the water reached almost to his neck. He hesitated briefly, for a moment unsure. Then, decision made, he began to swim purposefully toward the horizon, as though swimming toward a goal. He sliced through the water, creating a wake which disappeared instantly, leaving no evidence of his passage.

His arms tired and unable to go on, he stopped and began to tread water. The shore was far behind him now, and he could make out the lights from the house only dimly. Silence, like a blanket, covered him and taking a last long look at the sky, he closed his eyes, relaxed his muscles and slowly sank beneath the surface.

A sense of peace, of belonging swept through him, as his lungs began to swell. His mind floated, wrapped in a foggy haze. There was no pain, no discomfort, only a calm acceptance.

Suddenly Spock's face broke through the cloud and in his mind's eye he saw the Vulcan and heard him cry out.

"Jim! No!"

The suddenness, the surprise, jolted him and he struggled to the surface, spitting water.

My God, what am I doing?

He shook the water from his face and looked toward the shore, confused. The lights from the house were like a beacon, but it was so far away, he wasn't sure he could make it back. He began to swim slowly, for each breath was an effort of sheer will. His arms were leaden, his breaths came in short bursts, lungs struggled for air. The beach seemed no closer as every minute or two he was forced to stop and rest.

An eternity passed before he could make out the shoreline clearly and with only a few yards to go, his body gave up on him. He could go no farther. The waves washed him up on the sand. He tried to rise to his feet, but oblivion claimed him and he fell.

When he came to, much later, he found himself lying face down on the sand, rain was beginning to fall. He struggled to move and rolled over on his back, letting the rain wash the sand from his face. All the grief he'd bottled up came pouring out and he lay there, body wracked with sobs for some time.

Finally, tears spent, he forced himself to his feet and dragging himself to the house, he shed his clothes as he went, dropping them to the sand. He wandered aimlessly through the rooms, at last finding himself in the bedroom standing before the open glass doors, watching the storm play itself out in the distance. He watched until the last flash of lightening had faded away and then threw himself across the bed. His eyes closed and sleep came. This time there were no dreams.

When he awoke the next morning, the sun was shining through the windows. He lay quietly for a while as the breeze coming off the ocean drifted gently through the room.

The events of the past day were fuzzy in his mind, seeming as though it had been a million years ago in another lifetime. Suddenly, he wanted McCoy and bolting upright in bed, called out to him. Then he remembered that McCoy wasn't there and probably never would be. *I pushed him away.*

Grief washed over him as thoughts of Spock came, of the way things used to be. *How could it all have gone so wrong, so quickly.* He pictured Spock in his mind, playing the lyre on a day that seemed so long ago, and tears welled up in his eyes. No longer bitter tears, but cleansing tears fell, as all the pent up grief poured out.

After a while he felt the need to hear another human voice, and dressing quickly, he found himself walking through the nearby town. Strolling through the streets, he listened to the sound of life going on around him. Children were playing on the grass, shouting, laughing. Kirk sat on a bench and watched them.

They're so free and open. Sam and I used to be that way once. Sam... I wish I could see him... but he's dead... just like I'm going to be... soon.. like Spock is.... He thought back to when he first met Spock. At first, he hadn't thought they'd even be able to get along, let alone become friends. The Vulcan had been so stiff and formal. As the days and weeks passed, Kirk had learned to see through the facade, and the friendship had begun to grow. Now, everywhere he looked there were reminders of Spock, of something they had done together. Even this village square brought memories to the fore.

He noticed a small boy about eight years old, trying to pitch a ball and not quite succeeding. *He really is kinda clumsy... like I was. But Sam fixed that.*

He pictured himself playing baseball, Sam protecting his little brother from the taunts of his classmates. *In the end, all we really have are our memories, all that really lasts are yesterday's shadows.*

The boy was crying. He'd made another mistake and his friends were teasing him. Kirk rose and went over to him, putting a hand on his shoulder.

The boy looked up at the sandy haired man standing over him.

Kirk smiled. "Would you like to have me teach you to throw the ball?"

The child smiled through his tears and nodded.

Kirk demonstrated the proper stance to the child and then showed him the right way to throw the ball. He stood beside him until he was sure he had caught on, then said good-bye and walked off.

The boy yelled after him. "Mister... thank you."

It had felt good to be needed. His heart felt lighter and his walk had a little more spring in it. He knew then that he had to see McCoy, had to talk to him before it was too late. Going to the nearest visiphone, he contacted Starfleet Command. He was informed that the Doctor was no longer on the Enterprise, having left on an extended leave only the day before. They didn't know where he had gone. Neither did anyone else. He tried everyone and everyplace he could think of, but the even McCoy's daughter didn't know where he was. Kirk stared fixedly at the screen. He wasn't going to give up.

Summer came and with it, hot sun, warm winds and seagulls, so many that sometimes they filled the sky. Kirk liked to watch them, feeling himself up there with them, flying free. No problems, no pressures, just flight.

His life began to settle into a routine, broken only by the occasional summer storm. Rising before dawn, the beach beckoned and he watched the sunrise in silence. After breakfast, his antique bicycle was oiled and readied for the daily ride. He always made sure that his route brought him past the Reading Center on the way back, so that he could pick up more books. He became a voracious reader, as if he were trying to cram a lifetime of knowledge into a few short months. But it was also to fill the lonely hours.

In the evenings, there were occasional concerts, but mostly he read and listened to his music. The only thing missing was Spock and McCoy. He had not given up trying to find the Doctor.

Thoughts of Spock brought confusion. Though he understood now why his friends had done what they had, he still could not come to terms with the Vulcan's sacrifice. *I wish... but wishes are illogical.* He smiled at the word Spock had used so often. *If only I knew why.*



The sun was particularly bright and there was no wind with which to ease the heat. Kirk sat on the terrace, reading as music filled the air. He did not hear the doorbell, nor the footsteps approaching.

"Jim?" a voice said hesitatingly.

Kirk was startled. It was a voice he hadn't heard in some time and hardly expected to hear now. He dropped his book and looked up. The bright sun blinded him and all he saw at first was a tall figure, framed by a corona of light. He shaded his eyes, squinting. As his vision adjusted to the brightness, he blinked his eyes, not believing what he saw. *Bones? It can't be.*

Slowly, Kirk rose and took a step forward. "Bones?"

McCoy moved slightly toward him. "Hello, Jim," he said timidly.

They stood staring at each other for a moment, neither sure of the other's reaction. McCoy's heart skipped a beat as he scrutinized his old friend, unsure of a welcome, fearful of rejection once again.

Kirk shook his head, clearing the fog from his mind. He had once called this man his friend and then hurt him bitterly. He wondered what he could say.

The guarded expression on the Doctor's face belied his racing heart. He had come to try to bridge the gap between them while there was still time, but now that he was here, he was afraid. Finally, he broke the silence.

"Jim, I had to come," he said, shifting from one foot to the other.

Kirk spanned the space between them, throwing his arms around the Doctor tightly. McCoy was too startled to do more than just stand there at first. Then slowly, his arms encircled Kirk, pulling him tighter.

After a long while, McCoy disengaged himself, stepping back. Both men's cheeks were streaked with tears. Kirk reached out gently brushing the moisture from his friend's face.

"Don't say anything," he said.

"Jim, I'm sor..."

Kirk put a hand to the Doctor. "There's no need for apologies. We were both wrong," he said, voice thick with emotion. He smiled broadly through the tears. "I've been trying to find you for over a month, but no one knew where you were."

The two friends sat on the stone bench at the edge of the sand. McCoy felt lightheaded with relief. "I went back to Georgia for a while. I had to think things out."

Kirk was surprised. "I called there. They told me they didn't know where you were."

"They didn't lie. They didn't know. I was using an old cabin I own in the mountains. I didn't want to see anyone. After a while, I knew I had to come here."

Kirk squeezed the Doctor's hand as a line from an old song came to mind. *Love was always there... just a touch away.*

"I'm glad you came, Bones." Despite what he had said about blame, he felt the need to apologize. "I'm sorry."

McCoy shook his head. "No, Jim. You have nothing to be sorry for. It was a perfectly normal reaction. Spock and I were wrong. I knew it at the time, but went ahead regardless because I was afraid."

Kirk's eyes clouded over at the mention of Spock. "Why did he do it?" McCoy misunderstood the question, thinking that Kirk wanted to know why the Vulcan had lied to him. "I think that in Spock's case, it was a question of denial. As long as you didn't know, perhaps he felt it wasn't real." He raised

a hand to stop the protest he knew was coming. "I know, it wasn't logical, but then Spock never was when it came to your welfare."

Kirk came to a decision. "Bones, let's just start all over. All right?"

McCoy took the offered hand, holding on tight. "All right."

*T*he summer flew by. Now that McCoy was home once more, Kirk felt alive again. Each day, the world around seemed sharper, clearer. His senses intensified by what was to come, he found himself wanting to reach out greedily and grasp whatever he could.

McCoy was at his side constantly. He would stay as long as his friend needed him. He encouraged Kirk to try new things. When the Captain mentioned that he wished he could capture the sunset in his grasp, the Doctor suggested that he try painting it, and never one to back off from a challenge, Kirk did precisely that. Dragging McCoy along, Kirk trudged off to the nearest art supply center, miles away, and stocked up on more equipment than Michaelangelo had needed for the Sistine Chapel.

Every evening as the Doctor sat in the background and watched, Kirk tried to put on canvas what his heart saw. He had come to love the beauty of the sunset; the shadows it cast and the colors it threw on the clouds. At first, his efforts were clumsy, but after some practice, he found himself improving. It grieved him that he would probably not have enough time to really capture it, to perfect something he found himself enjoying almost as much as commanding a starship.



*K*irk and McCoy were sitting side by side on the beach resting up after a long swim. The Captain was absently throwing pebbles into the water as he spoke.

"Do you remember the time we taught Spock to swim, Bones?"

McCoy nodded. "He looked so uncomfortable."

"He was. He wouldn't have admitted it, but he was a little afraid of the water. I think he only did it to please me."

"He did a lot to please you, Jim. You were important to him."

Kirk's voice became almost a whisper. "He was important to me. I would have done anything for him. I wish he were here. It was such a waste. That magnificent brain. There was so much he could have accomplished, and he threw it all away."

"He was trying to protect you," said McCoy softly.



Lydia A. Moore

"But he knew I'd be dead in a few months anyway," insisted Kirk. "He gave me a few months, but cheated himself out of a lifetime."

"You would have done the same for him, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, but...."

"Jim, he did what he had to do. He didn't expect to die. You never know what's going to happen in a situation like that. In a crisis, even for a Vulcan, the first instinct is to act, not to stop and consider the consequences. He would not have left you to face the end alone." McCoy rested a soft touch on Kirk's arm. "I miss him, too."

"I know, Bones." Kirk looked out at the sea and spoke quietly. "When I was a child, there was a family that lived on the farm next door that had twin boys; fraternal twins. They were friends of my brother and older than me. I remember envying them, for the closeness they shared. Sometimes one of them would start to say something and the other would finish the sentence, without missing a beat, or even looking at the other. It was as if they were one soul in two bodies. I never thought I'd ever know that kind of sharing. Then Spock came along, and it was as if a missing part of myself had come home. When he died, part of me died too." He paused.

"You know, Bones, sometimes I seem to feel him nearby. I hear footsteps and I spring around, but there's no one there." Kirk looked down, stirring the sand with his fingers. "Bones, tell me. Did he know he was dying?"

McCoy hesitated. "There's no way to hide anything from someone as perceptive as he was. He knew."

"Do you know what Spock's last words to me were?" Kirk asked slowly, as he watched the setting sun.

McCoy was silent.

"He said, *I'll wait for you, Jim, in the morning*. Why did he say that if he knew he was dying?" Kirk did not really expect an answer. There was none that could be given. Only Spock could have answered that question.

Suddenly it was as if a door opened up and he could see beyond his own griefs to another's. His eyes blurring with with tears, met the Doctor's. "And you, Bones. Are you all right?"

McCoy was tired, but he felt as if a great weight had been taken from him. When he looked at Kirk, he didn't see a man who was dying. In his mind's eye was pictured the new young Captain of the Enterprise sitting in his command chair on a day that seemed only yesterday.

Kirk interrupted his thoughts. "Bones?"

McCoy's eyes focused once again and he smiled. "I'm fine, Jim. Just fine. Now."

They sat silently for some time, then McCoy spoke, gently putting into words as best he could what his grandmother had told him when his father died. "If you'll let him, he'll always be by your side. As long as he lives in your memory, he'll always be alive for you."

The days grew shorter, summer giving way to autumn. Almost a year had gone by since the operation and McCoy was watching the Captain closely, anxiously. He knew that time was running out. Kirk never mentioned it and McCoy had no wish to bring it up. Instead he found himself hovering, despite a conscious effort not to do any such thing. Kirk found it touching, calling him a mother hen.

Kirk had come to accept the inevitable, refusing to let it defeat him. It was the last victory he would have; not letting the fear ruin his remaining days. When the end came, he intended it to be dignified. He continued his painting, carefully working out in his mind what he would paint before he put his brush to the canvas.

Sometimes, when he stood at the easel, he felt a presence with him. He seemed to hear Spock saying, *I'm here, I'm waiting, don't worry.* The Vulcan was always in his thoughts. He felt close to him, not understanding the feeling. He lived again in his dreams the places they'd been, the things they'd done. He found himself imagining how Spock would have loved this place. And he was happy.



The sea was calm. *A beautiful day, perfect.* He was spending the day as a beachcomber, collecting shells. He waded in the surf, eyes riveted on the sandy bottom, toes pushing through the sand, searching for specimens. The pile of shells on the beach had grown steadily larger. He planned to spend the evening with McCoy, cleaning them, sorting them out. The best he would send to his nephew, Peter.

This day, it seemed as though his senses were tuned sharply to the sounds of life going on around him. The gulls flying high overhead on their way to the feeding grounds, the small waves washing over his feet, the gentle breeze; all these things taken so much for granted by people, made him realize the priceless gift he had been given.

He bent to pick an unusually large shell from the bottom, then washed it off. Examining it, he realized that it was the largest conch shell he'd ever seen. *Wouldn't be suprised if it were a record. Getting kinda dark, must be clouding up.* He looked up. There were no clouds. The sun was still shining. *Can't be more than three or four in the afternoon.* A momentary stab of fear coursed through him. Somehow he hadn't expected it to come this way, so suddenly. McCoy had told him what the first symptoms would be and how long he would have from then. He'd felt so well lately, that he had forgotten how long since he had been diagnosed.

"Jim!" shouted McCoy from the house. "Come on up."

A stab of anguish shot through Kirk at the sound of his friend's voice. Standing knee deep in the water, the shell clutched tightly in his hand, he stared up at the house; remembering. He thought of all the times over the years that McCoy had worked himself to the brink of collapse to save a life. *Have to spare him... can't let him know... can't let him watch....*

He drew back his shoulders and went to gather all the shells he'd collected. *There'd be no time for Peter now.* He trudged up the beach to the house.

McCoy was bringing a tray from the house, two tall glasses and a pitcher on it. He placed it on the table. "That's quite a collection you have there, Jim," he said, indicating the sack.

Kirk sat at the table and McCoy joined him a moment later carrying another tray with some small sandwiches on it.

Kirk was silent, thoughtful as he stared into his drink. Then he looked up at McCoy and smiled. A smile that spread to his eyes and lit his face. *Please... just let me carry this off.*

McCoy felt a twinge of sorrow for the fleeting happiness they had.

As Kirk stirred his drink with the straw absently, he spoke. "I think about Spock often, Bones. I miss him, but you were right. I do feel his presence. Sometimes, if I let myself, I can imagine him by my side."

McCoy nodded. "I know, so can I." A frown crossed his face. "I wish I hadn't been so hard on him, hadn't teased him so much."

"He knew you didn't mean what you said. That you cared." Kirk's eyes danced. "Do you remember our last shore leave, before it turned to tragedy?"

The Doctor grinned. "I sure do. It was the best I ever had."

"Do you remember telling me once that you were afraid of horses?" asked Kirk teasingly.

McCoy blushed. "Did I? I don't recall saying any such thing."

Kirk laughed. "Well, you did. But you sure seemed to be enjoying the ride."

"Well, I never claimed to be consistent, now did I?" replied McCoy.

Kirk went on, talking as though to himself. "It was so peaceful, quiet... beautiful. Just the three of us." He stared out to the sea. A cloud had drifted over the late afternoon sun. The smell of the salt air, the gentle breeze caressing his skin, the voices of the gulls passing overhead, all these things assailed his senses. He felt so alive. He couldn't remember ever feeling this alive before. There was no fear in him, only a sadness for having to leave McCoy alone. He reached across the table and clasped the Doctor's hand gently.

"Thanks, Bones," he said.

McCoy was startled. "For what?"

"Oh, for all the years of friendship, for being here. Everything."

McCoy's throat was choked with emotion and he couldn't say anything. The roar of a speedboat distracted them and when it had passed by the moment had gone. McCoy turned to another subject, one less open to tears.

"I took a look at the canvas you finished yesterday," he said.

Kirk was indignant. "I wanted to surprise you. Why do you think I haven't let you watch me work all week?"

"Sorry about that," answered McCoy with a grin.

"Well, Doctor, don't keep me in suspense. How did you like it?"

McCoy stalled for a moment, teasing. "It's beautiful, Jim." To McCoy, Kirk's smile seemed to light the fading day.

"It's yours, Bones. I want you to have it." *It's all I can offer.*

McCoy smiled and lifted his glass. "A toast, Jim. To absent friends."

Kirk lifted his glass in response. They drank the toast. Then Kirk set his glass on the table carefully. It rested on the edge, but he moved it before the Doctor noticed.

McCoy laughed suddenly.

"What's so funny? "

"I was just remembering Spock on a horse. He looked so uncomfortable."

"He was," said Kirk. "I think he was the one who was nervous about horses." A faraway look came over Kirk. "What I remember most vividly was that first morning. The three of us watching the sunrise together. I wished then that I could stop time." *I still do.* He couldn't make out McCoy very clearly. Only shapes were visible to him now and he knew he had better go. "How about helping me sort out the shells this evening."

"Sure, why not?"

Kirk placed his hands on the side of the chair and rose, pushing the chair back carefully. He put his hand casually on the table to steady himself.

"I'm beat. I think I'll take a nap before dinner," he said. He moved toward the glass doors, trying not to walk so slowly as to arouse McCoy's suspicions. His vision was very bad now and he felt weak. He stood in the doorway and looked back to where he knew the Doctor was seated. He could not make him out at all.

"I love you, Bones," he said and went into the house. *Good-bye.*

McCoy felt a twinge of fear and tears filled his eyes. "I love you too, Jim," he said softly, but Kirk had already gone.

Kirk moved slowly, managing to round the corner into the hall and out of the Doctor's line of sight, before his failing body betrayed him. His right leg buckled under him and he lost his balance, almost falling. He put out a hand and caught the sofa. Leaning against it for a moment, he caught his breath. *Only a few more feet.* His eyesight was almost completely gone now, only a little light filtered through. Feeling his way around the room, he found the entrance to his bedroom. He closed the door behind him and leaned against it.

He made his way across the room to the glass doors overlooking the ocean. Fumbling for the latch, he drew them open.

He felt the waning warmth of the sun on his face. Blind now, his heart still saw, what his eyes could not. Despite the beauty, he had always hated this time of day, the dying of the light, for he felt it was a kind of death. But he understood now what Spock had been trying to tell him, what he should have known himself. Without the sunset, there would be no sunrise to marvel at. The night was simply a waiting time, a time when all things could rest. It had a beauty all its own. He understood at last. *Just a brief night to prepare the way for the morning.* He suddenly felt very tired and making his way to the bed, laid down. His eyes closed. *So tired.*

He slept.



IN THE MORNING

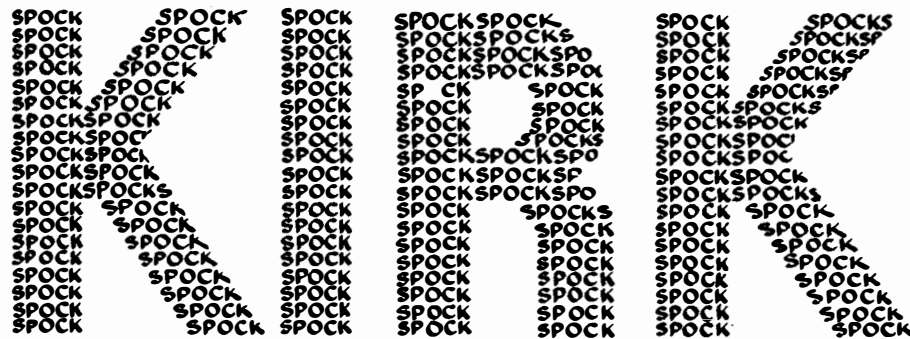
*Vision dims,
Breath fails,
Awareness fades.*

*Yet the long dark tunnel
Through which I pass,
Unveils a brilliance at the end.*

*And a light that holds a promise,
Of dawns to be,
Of tomorrows still to come.*

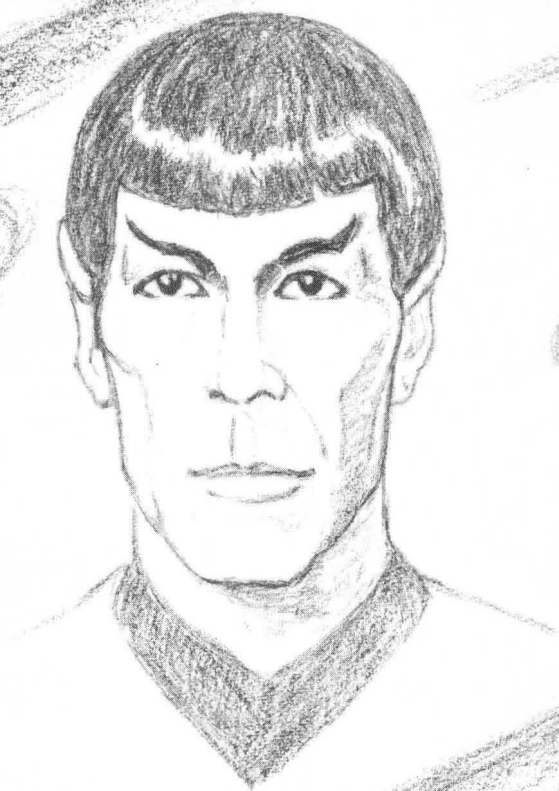
*Of a new beginning,
When the sun shall rise
On eternity,
Beside an old friend
Who waits for me,
In the morning.*





Take a lump of clay
Wet it, pat it
Make a statue of you
And a statue of me
Then shatter them,
Clatter them,
Add some water,
And break them
And mold them
Into a statue of me.
Then in mine,
There are bits of you
And in you
There are bits of me.
Nothing shall ever keep us apart.

KUAN TAO SHENG
(Sung Dynasty)



BAR 81 STAR TREK LIVES



Comfort

I lost myself,
Standing in a cold, stiff wind
On an empty alien plain.
The wind whips round me,
Savagely sending ice,
In freezing cascades,
Against my face and neck.
The cold cuts cruelly.

There's a subtle difference,
A gentleness interceeding,
Standing between the wind and I.
There are hands that reach,
Arms that find me
With a warm embrace.
And I accept.

Warmed and cherished,
I cherish the warmth.
The dark is banished in
Ice crystals aflame with light and life.

I've found myself
And you.

Martha J. Bonds

Sleeping Beauty

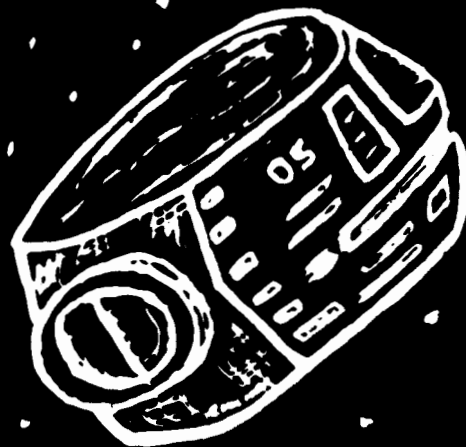
Within the steel and alloy filigree
Of her golden cage,
The pearl-white miracle
Of science and technology
Perches like a giant bird
Poised for flight
Waiting for the One
Who comes to set her free once more.
Free - to surge with all her dormant power
Which he, with his familiar touch,
Will coax to life,
Toward the awesome cloud
That threatens annihilation
Of their shared origin.

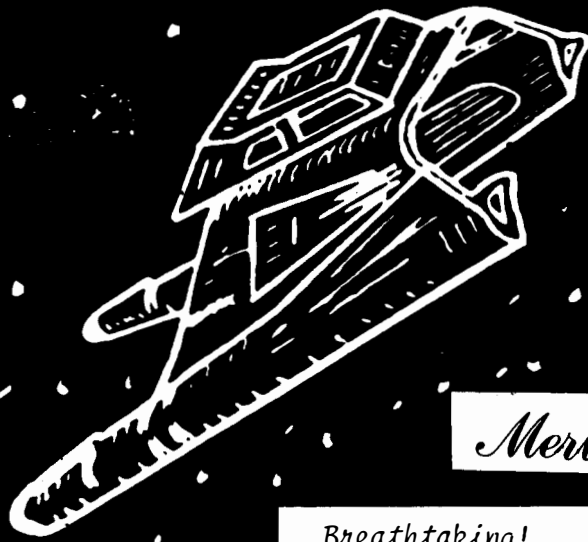
He approaches.
A mere and mortal man,
Tears drowning the stars in his eyes,
Evoked by the vision
Of his mechanized mistress
Shackled inside her suspended prison.
His heart stirs in total empathy
Of longing and desire
To feel the winds of space once more
To be as One - man and machine
Against the unknown.

What cynic dares to say
She has no soul?
He knows she will respond.
His touch - as gentle as a lover's kiss -
Has long been awaited,
Even as he has dreamed - unaware -
Of this moment.

He, too, has been a prisoner -
In heart and spirit,
Bound by invisible chains
Of duty and image...
And disappointment.
But fate has intervened,
Set him back on a determined course
To awake his Sleeping Beauty,
To face their destiny
And they will survive or perish
Together.

Beverly Volker





Merlin's Touch

Breathtaking!

Against the still, silent curtain of black
The gleaming metal skin
Of this silver temptress
Reflects the burnished glow of distant stars.
Her progress is uncommonly slow
For one who crossed galaxies
In the wink of an eye.
She strains to respond,
Obey the commands,
But time and interference
Have robbed her of the means.

He approaches -

A man of scientific skill,
The hammer of his heartbeat
Exposing emotions he will seek to deny.
He has listened to her cry for help
And remembered a lifetime ago
When he found a haven
In her circuit and computer-filled bosom,
Refuge in her warm steel arms.

He has the knowledge
To give her back her days of youth,
Fill her lungs with the breath
She needs to soar
With strength and power
Into the unknown enemy cloud
Which calls both Vulcan and Starship
Toward its waiting vortex.

He will respond to her need,
Face the destiny that will either
Destroy or renew both of them.
He has feared/longed for
This moment of return.

She knows
She calls, understands, demands.
Her heart beats in rhythm with his.
A living machine?
Illogical!



Facets Of Love

I look at you, my human friend, and see-
The pulsating red that speaks of life
The vibrant orange that speaks of joy
The warmth of gold that speaks of love.
Nothing is hidden - there for all to see.

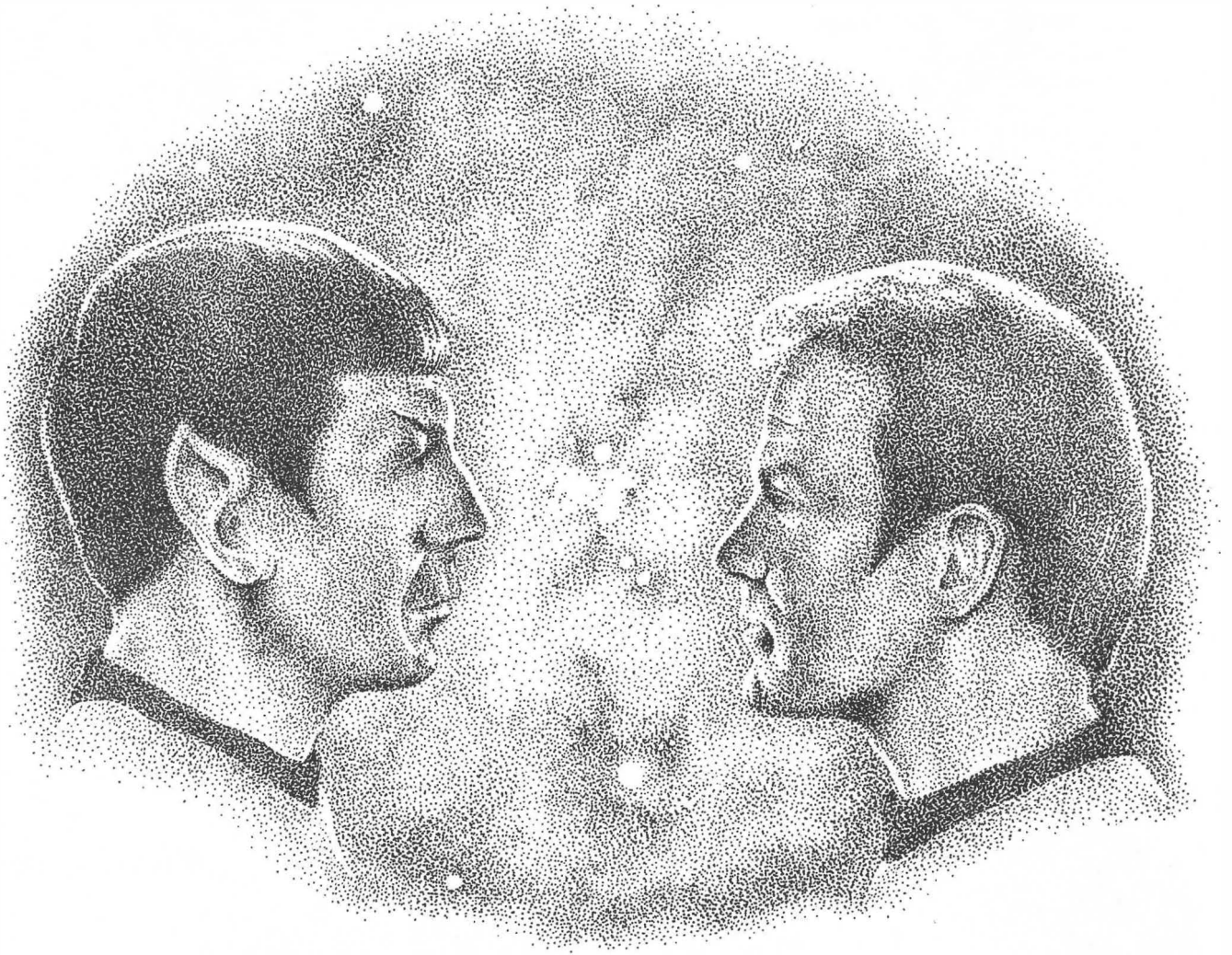
I look at you, my vulcan friend, and see-
The surging green that speaks of life
The calm blue that speaks of buried depths
The intense purple that speaks of deep emotion.
Everything is hidden - that none may see.

Together we are-
The glory of a sunrise
The peace of a sunset
A rainbow after the rain.

Merged we become-
The brilliance of stars in the darkness of the
Universe. ~~~~~

Terri Sylvester

GB



Nan Lewis '81

SOULS ENTWINED

Kirk... the captain
in command, in control

... must *be* the captain;
the image of perfection
... indestructable,
Starfleet's Finest.

and yet...

Spock...

legs buckle... *so tired*

I need...

quivering hand presses
at the furrowed brow

you.

Spock... proper Vulcan
logical, also in control

... must *be* Vulcan;
epitomy of reason, of restraint

Vulcan by choice and birth.

and yet...

Jim...

strong fingers grip the trembling
arm in silent support...
guiding the weaving figure to bed

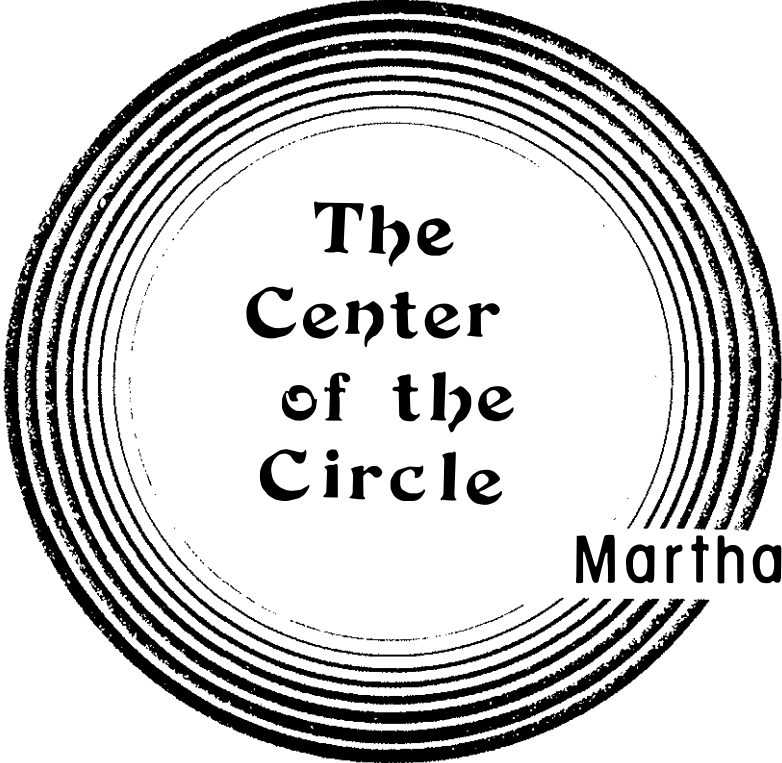
I understand.

soft fingertips caress
the throbbing temple

I am here.

KATHRYN E. MOORE





The Center of the Circle

Martha J. Bonds

*However far we travel,
Wherever we may roam,
The center of the circle
Will always be our home.*

-- John Lennon

Captain James Kirk and Commander Spock sat in silence, staring deep into each other's eyes. Oblivious to their surroundings, they ignored the soft music and muted conversations of other occupants of the Rec Deck. The place was nearly empty at this hour anyway; the others were clustered in small groups some distance from their Captain and First Officer.

After many long moments of contemplation, Kirk was the first to react. He felt his pulse quicken and knew his eyes betrayed his delight. Spock's expression changed as well to one of slight surprise and then amusement.

The Vulcan sighed, shaking his head and glancing down at the vitronic-B board between them. Kirk had duplicated Spock's own mindfind patterns precisely. "I believe we should go back to chess, Captain," he said in a tone of mock exasperation.

"I think I can still beat you at that game too, my friend," Kirk warned, smiling.

Spock sat back, lifting his palm away from the board. "Yes, but your success at chess is the result of pure chance, while the psi-empathic skill required for this game is more... disconcerting."

Kirk grinned wickedly for an instant, but when he replied his voice was soft. "See how well I know you?" When Spock did not answer, he went on encouragingly, "Come on, let's try it again."

Spock favored the Human with an appraising glance. "Very well," he said decisively and leaned forward, indicating that Kirk was welcome to proceed.

The Human touched his palm to the glass on his side of the board, again making mental connection with the game's circuitry. As his design was played out in the lights and lucite sculpture of the board, he looked up to meet the Vulcan's inquisitive gaze.

The contest this time was more brief. Spock's eyes glowed as he caused a perfect replica of Kirk's patterns to emerge. To Kirk's look of consternation, he shrugged and commented, "It's quite simple, really, as soon as one -- what is the expression -- gets the hang of it?"

"Okay, you've made your point," Kirk laughed good-naturedly. "We're even."

"Do you find that fact surprising?" Spock's voice was low, warmly melodic.

Kirk smiled, leaning back against the orange upholstery. "No, not at all." *That we're together, evenly matched in all things, no. That you're here, talking, relaxing like this... yes. Every now and then I catch myself feeling surprised again to see you aboard the Enterprise.*

Their empathy seemed to be fully intact. Spock replied as if Kirk had spoken aloud. "At times, I still wonder at the fact of my presence here."

'Are you still sure you want to stay?' Kirk wanted to ask, though he knew he didn't need to. The Vulcan had never seemed more certain, more serene, than he did now. Still, Kirk knew he had been through a lot in the past three years, and especially two weeks ago on the V'ger mission. While Spock had finally come to terms with the diverse sides of his personality, there remained some adjustments to be made. Life aboard the Enterprise was going to be very different from surviving in the harsh Vulcan desert.

"I've come home, Jim." The Vulcan spoke simply, quietly. "The Enterprise seems much changed, but she holds my answers, still fulfills my needs. I am quite comfortable here." He glanced around the spacious Rec Deck, his tone growing more jovial. "I must confess though, that my cabin and the rest of the ship are appointed quite a bit more lavishly than my recent quarters on Vulcan. I'm not sure I can adapt to all this... luxury."

Despite the lightness of the words, Kirk frowned. During the two weeks the Enterprise had been on shake-down, he had learned some of the details of Spock's meager existence on Gol. The disciplines were harsh, exacting, painful both physically and emotionally, and Kirk ached inside when he thought of what Spock had felt he had to put himself through. Nevertheless, to look at him, Kirk had to believe that the reinstated Commander was making the transition smoothly. Perhaps his years of privation and self-examination had served to prepare him for this homecoming, to accept and enjoy his own emotions, rather

than to purge them, as he had once thought. Still, mused the Human, somewhat annoyed at the perversity of his thoughts, he had not yet been put to the test, he had thus far faced only the routine of life aboard ship. Might he not feel safer retreating into logic at some future time when a crisis presented itself?

Spock shivered slightly, bringing Kirk's attention back to the immediate situation. "You're still feeling cold," he rebuked the Vulcan. "Doesn't your shirt keep you warm enough?" he asked, indicating the blue collar protruding from the neck of Spock's uniform.

"It helps," Spock assured, massaging his arms. "I am adapting. After several hours, however, my concentration moves on to other things which are more important than my physical comfort."

Kirk shook his head. *That* sounded like something a disciple of the Kolinahr would say. "Have you been down to see Bones today?" he asked, though he thought he could guess the answer. "I don't want you going without those vitamin shots."

"Jim," Spock began patiently, "I have told you that on Gol, I trained my body to compensate for the lack of ingesting certain B-complexes... "

"Uh-huh," Kirk replied, "you learned to subsist on a starvation diet, in other words." He started to say something else, but the perceptive Vulcan was ahead of him.

"I'm not fatigued, either, Jim." There was a faint trace of amusement in the deep voice. "If you remember, I learned to require but two point four... "

"Right." Kirk interrupted him again. "And I also remember that after the dalfilene wore off you collapsed on the bridge and had to be carried back down to Sickbay where you slept for three days. 'Two point four hours'... like hell!"

"Really, Jim," Spock protested, "You are beginning to remind me of McCoy. Isn't this an example of what you call 'mother-henning'?"

Chagrined, Kirk eased up. He couldn't really treat the Vulcan like a child. Spock seemed to know his limitations. Still, the Human couldn't help his concern. "It's late and I'm planning on getting some rest." Almost embarrassed, Kirk added, "I don't want to sound bossy, but... "

Spock drew himself up straight, dignity unruffled. "Think nothing of it, Captain. Considering that tomorrow's schedule will be rather hectic, I believe I too shall retire early this evening."

"Good." Kirk returned to his earlier teasing tone. "Let's go. I insist that all my officers be in perfect health -- and you deserve the luxury." He paused, continuing more seriously, "Sorry if I sounded over-protective... I just... " *... just feel maybe I neglected you -- and that during the last three years you neglected yourself...*

Spock might have read the Human's thoughts again. He mumbled something under his breath as they proceeded toward Sickbay, and to Kirk it sounded like, "You are one luxury I could learn to accept..."





Marlin '81

Spock did not sleep the full eight hours his Captain had suggested; though the large new bed in his quarters was comfortable, he awoke two hours early. For a few moments he let himself stretch languorously beneath the silky sheets, then went to shower and dress in his uniform.

It was not habit alone that had caused him to awaken so early. He was in truth anxious to begin the new day aboard the Enterprise. The Vulcan admitted the eagerness he felt regarding the return to his work on this ship. After the harshness of Gol, the sterility and aloneness of the past years, the camaraderie of the crew was most welcome, imparting a feeling of comfort and relaxation such as he had never known.

Spirits were running high aboard the refurbished ship. The success of the V'ger mission had cemented rapport between the old hands and the newly assigned crewpersons. Spock felt a part of that rapport in a more immediate way than ever before, finding himself especially receptive to the warmth the crew projected, and no longer felt the need, as he had upon his arrival, to close himself off from it. Perhaps he might never be any more demonstrative toward the crew in general than he had been, but he suspected that those who had known him previously would sense the changes in him nevertheless.

He was home again. Three weeks ago he had never expected to see this ship and these Humans again. Even after his arrival, he had not thought about staying. The reunion was sufficiently painful... and he had not dared to expect that the ship would survive.

The Enterprise and Earth did survive however, and Spock of Vulcan had come back to stay. Though the events of the mission were in themselves awesome, Spock found himself marvelling as much over the more personal connotations as the cosmic. He had come here to find answers for his own questions, answers which had eluded him on Gol. Yet he had also come in response to a need he had sensed within Kirk. It was a need he had tried to deny, a tie he'd tried to sever. The Vulcan scientist knew that seldom did the universal laws of logic -- or the whims of fate -- allow for second chances. He counted himself very lucky.

After dressing, Spock sat down at the desk in the work area and punched up the schematics for the computer sections he would test today, reminding himself that he should put the extra time this morning to better use than the romantic cogitation of recent events. Just because he admitted and accepted his emotions was no reason to throw away his logic entirely. The control so carefully gained through the rigid discipline of Gol could be tempered to this life and would stand him in good stead. Abruptly, Spock's mind supplied a picture of Kirk's disapproval of the sight of him sitting up, fully dressed and beginning his day's work an hour and a half before his duty shift -- and all without taking time for a proper breakfast.

Spock flipped off his computer readout. After three years of virtual isolation, he was grateful for the close companionship he and Kirk were sharing now. Spock was not used to having someone *worry* about him though. He had lived a spartan life and creature comforts, no matter how pleasing, seemed superfluous. The Human saw things differently, and Spock did not really mind. He supposed Kirk was right in saying that he owed himself a little 'luxury'. What his Captain did not realize however, was that just being with Kirk was luxury enough.

Home at last... Spock thought as he rose to leave the cabin. *Still, things have definitely changed here.* The ship appeared more spacious, brighter and more colorful. It all seemed a bit new, a bit strange and lacking the personal touches. Spock had not realized until now -- the closeness he'd been sharing with Kirk must have camouflaged the deficiency before -- but all at once he realized the rooms he inhabited were nearly as devoid of warmth, familiarity and personality as the caves in which he'd slept on the desert.

His quarters were likely to remain so for quite some time. Spock had nothing with which to personalize them, having brought only a small carry case with him from Vulcan. Only a small case of clothing... Spock sighed, suddenly feeling chilly again. A bit distractedly, he reached to turn up the thermostat before stepping into the corridor.

He stopped at the door to the Captain's cabin. Kirk answered the buzzer immediately and Spock entered the rooms to find him up, dressed and busily engaged in unpacking six or seven cartons that had been delivered sometime during the night.

"Morning, Spock." Kirk looked up from his work long enough to favor the Vulcan with a smile. "Courier finally caught up with us," he said by way of explanation, indicating the cartons. "Now I can get this place looking like home."

"Indeed." Spock came forward to assist him. Together they unpacked a carton of leather-bound books, Kirk's personal favorites.

The Captain's fingers caressed the old volumes lovingly as he lay them on the shelf above the bed. "Funny -- I can remember reading and re-reading these on nights when things were tense out here, nights when a mission had gone wrong or I couldn't sleep because of decisions to be made and weighing what was right and what was wrong. They gave me some peace and some distance..." The Human looked up, meeting Spock's eyes. "I don't believe I opened any of them once during the last three years."

Spock watched a fleeting sadness, tinged with a shadow of regret, pass through Kirk's expressive eyes. The Vulcan swallowed, slightly uncomfortable, aware that he had been at least partly the cause of those feelings. The books and other possessions held good memories, though. They cheered the rooms, making them seem less empty than Spock's.

The Captain placed the last book on the shelf then, and his face brightened. "Don't look so down, Spock," he chided. "There's no use analyzing everything that happened or every move we made. All I know is, I'm glad to be back. I think we can put the last three years into perspective -- take what we learned and apply it to now. And take the best from the last five year mission, too."

Spock's eyes echoed the warmth in Kirk's tone; he tried to quash his own regrets and the sudden sense of loss evoked by the sight of Kirk's mementos. He too felt it would be wise to overlook past mistakes. One of his own errors, he saw now, had been in not saying what he felt, not finding the words necessary to express himself. Though there was much between them that required no verbalization, Spock sensed that his speaking aloud would be comforting --

to both of them. "I agree," he said, letting his hand come to rest for a moment on Kirk's wrist. "Looking back would serve no useful purpose. Mistakes were made on both our parts. It is my opinion that the fates have intervened in our lives again, setting us back on the proper course."

Kirk's eyes twinkled; he appeared both amused and touched by the Vulcan's statement. He checked the chronometer and sighed. "It's getting late. I won't be able to finish here and still have time for breakfast before the watch begins. I suppose my redecorating can wait until this evening."

Spock surveyed the clutter skeptically. "Are you sure you'll have time to complete the job in just *one* evening?"

Kirk glared at him a moment, then shrugged. "So, my yeoman at the Base was a little over-zealous in the packing. But I'm glad so much was sent." He glanced pointedly at the blank walls and newly installed consoles. "All this stuff makes me feel more at home in here, like a link between the old Enterprise and the new -- and to the old me, too."

"I understand." This time Spock was not teasing. He had spoken sincerely, but couldn't keep a certain wistfulness out of the remark.

Kirk seemed to catch something in the tone of his voice. "Are you having your things sent, or would you prefer to go pick them up? Scotty did say we could have you home in four days."

"A special trip will not be necessary." Spock's throat felt tight, the way it used to when though he knew being more specific would have been helpful he could not force any more than the most formal of words past his lips. He swallowed, seeing that Kirk was about to question him further. Trying to abide by his resolution to express himself clearly and fully, he began, "I... there is nothing I... need..." He could not go on.

Kirk didn't understand, though he obviously realized something was wrong. "What is it, Spock?" he asked gently.

It still hurt to think about, even after all this time. Spock lifted his eyes to the ceiling, dragging them away from the sight of Kirk's possessions. "When one enters the discipline of the Kolinahr, all worldly goods must be given up. I..." He faltered again, then finished hurriedly, "... there is nothing on Vulcan which is mine."

There was a moment of shocked silence. When Spock sensed the Human was about to stammer an apology, he finally sought Kirk's eyes. The open compassion that met his gaze was almost more than he could handle, however, and before he had time to analyze what he was doing, the Vulcan retreated behind a wall of non-emotion. "It is something I accepted long ago, Jim," he stated with only the barest hint of hesitation in his voice. "Something which, at the time, I thought was for the best, particularly in my case. As I said a moment ago, bitterness serves no purpose."

Kirk opened his mouth to speak, closed it and tried again, as if a hundred questions swirled through his mind. "But... is there no way to get them back?"

Spock answered him with a look. In his own mind, he could still see the way his quarters used to look. "I am glad that you have so many mementos from those days, Jim," he said, though he knew his voice was hollow. Control was difficult to unlearn, and in this instance he was glad he still possessed the ability. He knew his tone clearly demonstrated he had no wish to discuss the subject further. Kirk looked abashed though, and Spock sought to relieve his concern. Forcing himself to relax, he went on casually, "At least there will be less in my quarters that will require cleaning and maintenance."

Kirk, too, seemed to attempt lightness, though he did not sound fully convinced. "Okay. At any rate, let's go have some breakfast. I don't know about you, but I'm starved."

"Breakfast would be most welcome." Spock succeeded in pushing aside the last vestiges of remorse and when they reached the Officer's Mess, he ate almost as hearty a meal as the Captain.



Once on the Bridge, neither man had much time to indulge in personal considerations. Kirk coordinated the tests on navigation and weapons control while Spock continued his in-depth computer check-out. The procedures were well underway for the morning when Uhura reported a call from Starfleet Command.

It was Admiral Nogura. Kirk nodded pleasantly in greeting.

"Good morning, Captain Kirk." There was an edge to the Admiral's voice, a slight inflection on the word 'captain'.

Kirk pretended not to notice. "Something, Admiral?"

Nogura nodded, getting down to business. "If the Enterprise is space-worthy," he prefaced, though both men knew there was to be no 'if' about it, "you are ordered to Sector 3. We've had a priority one distress call from our colony on Emery IV. Communications have been too garbled to get all the details, but it's some kind of natural disaster -- earthquakes, flooding. The colony is in chaos. They need medical help, and fast, Kirk."

"I see." Kirk nodded, then leaned toward Sulu. "Compute ETA at warp 8, Mr. Sulu."

The helmsman busied himself at his board a moment, then replied. "Twenty-one hours, sir."

"Good, Kirk," Nogura answered, having heard Sulu's estimate. "Your medical department can handle this, I'm sure. See that we get a report of casualties and that your geologists find out what happened. I don't need to remind you of the colony's importance."

"No, sir." Kirk knew that Emery IV had an old established colony made up of scientists and engineers from several Federation races. Their chief industry was mining and dilithium crystals were plentiful. The colonists had successfully developed the planet and had been a great help to the small native population.

Colonists and those indigenous to the planet had intermarried and a thriving culture was the result. Emery IV was held up as a textbook example of Federation policy in action.

Nogura looked satisfied. "You may get underway when ready, Captain."

"Aye, sir."

Within moments, orders had been given and the U.S.S. Enterprise was streaking her way toward the first assignment of her new mission.

As the big ship neared the Emery system, communications with the colonists improved. After the first garbled reports, more information began to come in and Kirk was able to get some idea of the types and numbers of casualties. A series of earthquakes along a fault-line that crossed through the most heavily populated area had occurred and more were expected.

Earlier in the day, Kirk had briefed his department heads on what was already known about the crisis. Just as his duty shift was ending, the Enterprise received word that a new quake in the heart of the colony had badly damaged the already-overflowing main hospital.

Kirk decided to stop off at the Sickbay complex to let McCoy know about the latest development.

The outer rooms were in a flurry of activity. Medical personnel and technicians were preparing crates of supplies to be beamed to the surface on arrival. In the center of what looked to Kirk like a mass of clutter stood Dr. Christine Chapel, clipboard in hand, directing operations.

She smiled as he made his way through the disorder. "I know it looks bad now," she began, obviously realizing what he'd been thinking, "but we'll have it all squared away in time."

"Good, Chris," Kirk returned, "but you may have more to handle down there than we first thought. The major hospital's just been destroyed."

"Oh, my." Chapel looked both grim and determined. "You'll want to speak to Dr. McCoy, too, then. He's in his office."

Kirk left her to her job and made his way through the disarray. Behind him, he could hear her calling new orders to her aides.

In his office, McCoy was also surrounded by clutter, but it took Kirk a moment to realize that the doctor was *unpacking* rather than loading articles into the cartons that filled the room.

"What are you doing, Bones?" Kirk couldn't help grinning.

McCoy looked up. "Dim, this is probably the last chance I'll have to get these things put away. If I don't do it now, they'll spend the next five years still packed up."

Kirk held up a hand. "Okay, okay. I was just asking. Still, I thought you'd be as hard at work getting ready to beam down as the rest of your department."

McCoy glared at him, but his tone was light. "One of the things I loved about being CMO but thought I'd forgotten was the privilege of being able to delegate authority. Chris has everything under control, Jim. I'll be settled when you need me."

Kirk described the recent damage to the hospital on Emery IV. McCoy considered a moment, then nodded. "We were planning on having to set up a field hospital anyway. It'll just mean moving down a bit more equipment and bedding. I must say, the designers certainly gave us the resources to do it." He glanced appreciatively around his newly refurbished office.

"Good. I was sure you could handle it." Kirk sat down as McCoy went back to his unpacking. The Captain glanced at the shelves, the desk top and the glass-enclosed cases along the wall. They seemed full already, but still the doctor pulled items from the cartons. "Bones," Kirk wondered finally, "what *is* all this?"

McCoy sighed. "It is a terrible mess, isn't? And you should see my quarters. These are just the left-overs, the keepsakes and specimens."

"I don't understand. Aren't you the guy who always reminded me to travel light?"

"I should have reminded my housekeeper of that."

"Your housekeeper?"

"Ms. Deren. I hired her to look after my house, and she's always sort of looked after me, too." *

"A little too well, I'd say," Kirk chuckled.

"Now, Jim," McCoy chided. "I wasn't really very specific about what I wanted her to send. My orders got me here in such a rush I didn't have time to get anything together. She just wanted my office to seem homey."

Kirk looked dubious. "It does. It does."

McCoy opened another box, glanced in at the contents, shuddered and closed it again. He sat down. "That can wait. Care for a drink?"

Kirk accepted the offered glass and the two sat in silence for a moment. Finally Kirk spoke. "I did some unpacking this morning, too. Spock came in and... "

"How is he, Jim?"

"You know, Bones, if you'd asked that last night, I'd have said everything was fine. Now, I'm not so sure."

**see "Spanish Moss" by Pamela S. Rose, NOME 4*

"What happened?"

"Nothing happened. I found out something, that's all. He came in while I was putting things away and I mentioned that we could either have a courier bring his things out or we could arrange to go pick them up. He told me it wouldn't be necessary. Bones... he has nothing -- nothing left from before." Kirk looked down at his hands, his mind replaying the scene in his quarters, hearing again the hurt in the deep voice, watching the pain in the face he'd been able to read so well. *Just like always. No. Don't let us go down that road again...* Kirk took a sip of his drink and went on. "Apparently, a disciple of the Kolinahr must relinquish all his worldly goods. I have no idea what that means -- they could be in cold storage or they could have been phasered out of existence... I don't know."

"Spock wouldn't say?" McCoy guessed.

"No, and I didn't press. It obviously hurt him to think about his things. Those beautiful Vulcan artifacts... his firepot... oh, damn -- his lyrette. God, Bones..." Kirk fully empathized with Spock's pain. "But you know, he couldn't talk about it. He hid the hurt -- almost, almost the way he used to. His voice got cold and his face had that closed mask..."

"*Almost* like he used to?" McCoy struck a nerve with that comment. The words 'or exactly' hung in the air, unspoken.

"Are you saying he hasn't changed, Doctor?" Kirk challenged, annoyed that McCoy had perceived his own worry. "That he can't? Maybe he did go 'Vulcan' on me, but why not? Would you want to talk about giving up everything you owned that meant anything to you?"

"Take it easy, Jim. I'm not faulting him. I know he's had a rough time these last few years, and just as rough a time on the V'ger mission."

"I know, too. He's mentioned things, off and on. Bones, we can't imagine what it was like for him on Vulcan. I know he thought he had to do it, but -- "

"But you couldn't stop him. Let it go, Jim. It's over. He's back now, trying to put it behind him. Maybe you feel you let him down somehow, didn't hear a cry for help that he couldn't even make during those last years of the mission, and that you couldn't reach him while he was on Vulcan. You've got a chance now, all three of us do."

Kirk gave a slight smile, grateful for McCoy's steadiness. "You're right. It worried me, though. He was so relaxed, so comfortable these last few days. And happy, I thought."

McCoy leaned forward, meeting Kirk's eyes as he spoke. "Give him time, Jim. He worked a lifetime to build his controls, maybe he can't learn to let go so fast."

The Captain nodded and finished his drink. "Thanks, Bones, I tried never to push him before, guess I shouldn't now." He rose and started for the door. "Come on, we've both got work to do."

McCoy snorted. "You sat behind a desk for three years. It's about time you got off your..."

"Oh no, Doctor. I worked hard -- and I learned quite a lot."

"What?" McCoy was suspicious.

"How to delegate authority!" Kirk mimicked McCoy's earlier tone. "Now, get moving, Mister!"

As he hurried through the door, Kirk could hear the doctor beginning to laugh.

The Captain made his way to his quarters feeling somewhat heartened. He was still concerned about Spock, but determined to try to help ease the Vulcan's transition back into a normal way of life. With the help of a friend, Kirk thought, he could finally achieve the peace he sought and allow all the old wounds to heal.

Kirk sat down at his desk and checked the chronometer. They were still nearly twelve hours away from Emery IV and he had many tasks to perform before the Enterprise reached her destination. He decided he'd better follow his own orders and get busy. First though, he put in a call to Uhura. There was something with which she could assist him.



When the Enterprise arrived, Emery IV was in complete chaos. Though the planet's inhabitants had been able to function when the quakes began, as the crisis worsened, they found themselves more and more devastated by the disaster. The area of the seismic disturbance extended throughout the heavily populated low lands and up into the difficult to reach mountain communities. Limited amounts of food had been stored for emergency use and the scope of the earthquakes was so vast that seventy percent of the population was without shelter. Medical personnel were faced not only with injuries but also the spread of infectious disease as water supplies became contaminated.

Kirk's staff set to work immediately, organizing with the available inhabitants to get things under control. Teams from engineering began building emergency shelters while geologists attempted to investigate the possibility of preventing further quakes. The injured were cared for in the two field hospitals set up, one in the charge of Dr. Chapel and the other headed by Dr. McCoy. Shuttle teams were sent to search for survivors of mountain quakes.

Three days after the arrival of the Enterprise, a new series of quakes began, this time in one of the out-lying towns. Collapsing buildings and a flooded river threw the people into a panic. As things seemed under control in the main city, Lerren, Kirk and Spock accompanied the rescue team sent to the new disaster area. The Captain felt his official presence would calm the people and let them know that the Federation was doing everything possible to help them.

As the two shuttles touched down on a hill overlooking the village of Toulon, the emergency team got a view of devastation nearly as bad as the one they had faced back in Lerren.

Spock followed Kirk out of the shuttle and as they took in the sight of the town, the two paused, their eyes meeting briefly. The sight of so much destruction and the suffering of sentient beings had an effect on both of them. It might have been safer for the Captain and First Officer to remain back in Lerren, or even on the ship, but each man felt there was something he personally could do to help. There was no time for conversation, however. Both officers set about getting the rescue operation underway.

Most of the houses were partially submerged by the river that had flooded its banks that morning and other structures had partially collapsed. In pairs, the Enterprise crew members moved out, looking for survivors.

In the chill morning air, Toulon at first remained quiet. As the rescuers began calling, shouts started echoing back and forth and it was realized that many citizens had survived. Kirk shot a look of relief at Spock as the two climbed over the rubble of what had once been a school.

A number of people had gathered in a large building on the high bank. The rescuers moved in that direction. As they did, more cries for help were heard and several of the villagers could be seen hanging out of the windows, waving desperately.

As they negotiated the rocky ground, Kirk stopped short and put a hand out, clasping Spock's forearm. The Vulcan paused beside him.

"Something, Captain?"

"That building doesn't look too stable, Spock." Kirk answered without taking his eyes from the precariously balanced structure.

Spock looked at it appraisingly. "It should remain steady if the people do not move about within it too much."

Kirk spoke into his wrist communicator, telling Lt. Van Buren, who was closest to the building, to warn its occupants.

Seconds later, another tremor shook the ground at their feet. Kirk swayed. Spock reached out to support him, but both were thrown to the ground as the earth shuddered violently. There was a roaring sound as man-made structures shook and boulders tossed about.

Spock raised his head and blinked dust from his eyes. He felt slightly dazed, but pushed himself up to his knees, looking around for Kirk.

"Jim!"

The Captain was already sitting up and pushing aside debris in annoyance. Spock reached him and the two helped each other to their feet.

"You are uninjured?" Spock grasped Kirk's shoulders.

"I think so." Kirk appeared distracted. He reached a hand toward the Vulcan's head. "You're hurt, though."

Spock flinched as the Human's fingers brushed his temple. They came away smeared with dark green blood. Spock barely noticed though. Hearing that Kirk was all right, he had turned back toward the building.

Kirk followed his gaze. "Damn." Spock's minor injury temporarily forgotten, they moved off again toward the collapsed structure.

It had fallen so that most of the people inside were thrown into the swollen river. Some were trapped beneath the surface, others were struggling to stay above the water in spite of injuries. Most of the Enterprise rescue team was unhurt. Some of the crew moved to help those who were trapped and drowning, while others treated the injured on dry ground.

Kirk and Spock waded into the water at the river bank and began pulling frightened citizens up on the shore. The cold water made Spock shiver and his head began throbbing after only a few minutes of exertion. The bleeding from the cut had stopped, and he willed himself to ignore the discomfort.

A woman was drowning. She was floundering in the deep water near the middle of the river. At the same time, both Kirk and Spock plunged into the water and together they swam out to rescue her.

Kirk put his arm around her neck and began towing her back to shore. The woman fought him, crying out desperately. She nearly pushed the Captain under and in the struggle to subdue her, Spock managed to swallow large mouthfuls.

"No! The children! No!" the woman cried again.

Kirk finally managed to get a better hold on her. He met Spock's eyes. "The children? Where? Where are they?"

Coughing, the woman could only wave her arm frantically in the direction of the submerged building.

"Okay." Kirk tried to soothe her. "We'll get them. Don't worry."

Again his eyes locked with the Vulcan's. "Can you make it out there?"

Spock avoided the question, answering with a comment based in logic. "You appear to have the better hold on the lady, sir."

Kirk grimaced but agreed. His eyes traveled to the other crewpersons aiding villagers near the sinking building. "Get some help. And when I get her to safety, I'll come out, too."

The two separated, Kirk heading for the shore while Spock swam out to the danger area. The First Officer shouted orders at Enterprise personnel and soon everyone who could was helping him search for the missing children.

The youngsters, it was soon discovered, were trapped in a section of the building that had not disintegrated upon falling into the river. A small air pocket in the room had kept them alive thus far, but the water was rapidly rising.

The water was dark and freezing cold. Spock dove beneath the surface and tried, with the help of Ensigns Winter and Arnold, to break into the submerged chamber. The effort took several moments and when at last the door yielded to combined Vulcan and Human strength, all was strangely still in the underwater room.

Winter and Arnold swam to the surface, their air supply exhausted, but Spock pushed into the dark tomb. He could make out just one form in the dimness and grasping it, turned and propelled himself out of the building and up toward the fresh air.

In the light, he discovered that he held the lifeless body of a young boy. The fear that he would be too late to save any of the others drove him to dive, without hesitation, beneath the surface again.

Ensign Winter descended beside him, carrying a porta-light. The beam helped to illuminate the eerie interior of the children's prison. Winter and Spock found two more still forms and carried their burdens to the surface.

Three bodies. Spock dove again, this time vaguely aware that it was his Captain who swam at his side. Kirk found a fourth tiny body and started out of the room, while Spock pushed toward the far corner. He thought he could discern a small remaining airspace and saw that another child clung there, still breathing.

Still alive. Spock reached the youngster and felt small hands clutch at him convulsively. His head broke the surface of water at the disappearing air pocket. "Take a deep breath, child," he commanded. Frightened eyes met his, but he was instantly obeyed.

Taking the frail body firmly, Spock propelled himself through the water-filled chamber. He felt a moment of frantic doubt when he was unable to locate the door.

There... He pushed against the bottom with all his strength and was breaking the surface, still clasping the choking child, before either of them ran out of air.

Kirk was there, trying to take her from him and lift her into a boat, but the girl's arms were locked too tightly around Spock's neck. The Captain and two others helped pull the Vulcan and his charge to safety then, and began rowing for the shore. Leaning back in the small paddle-boat, the half-drowned child still sobbing against his neck, Spock realized he was shaking as much as she.

Kirk had noted his condition and was wrapping a blanket around Vulcan and child. Spock's fingers brushed the long, wet hair from the little girl's face. She looked up at him, an expression of utter trust in the reddened eyes.

Spock went weak, the adrenaline draining out of him, the look in the child's eyes causing a strange sensation within that seemed to wring his heart. He glanced up and, finding Kirk still watching him, reached to clasp the Human's hand.



"You never cease to amaze me," Kirk whispered, his voice a soothing balm to Spock's frayed nerves.

The Vulcan tried to speak and found he was more drained than he had realized. "Had to... save...couldn't let them... all die... "

Moments later, the boat was dragged ashore and one small girl, a slightly dazed Vulcan and a very bedraggled starship Captain were helped out.



The young survivor of the Toulon disaster lay in a bed in a corner of the large ward at McCoy's field hospital. At her side sat Commander Spock, looking the picture of unruffled Vulcan dignity as he watched over her from the vantage point of a stool pulled close to the cot.

Kirk approached quietly and laid a hand on Spock's shoulder by way of greeting.

The Vulcan put a finger to his lips as he looked up at his Captain. "She's sleeping, finally."

"That's good." Kirk's answer was quiet. "She's doing better, then."

"My presence seems reassuring." Spock flexed his shoulders as he spoke. "She was visiting relatives in Toulon. Her family lives here in Lerren. We haven't been able to locate them yet."

Kirk looked down at the sleeping child. "Poor little thing. She's been through a lot."

Spock nodded. Kirk moved to stand behind him and lifted his hands to the Vulcan's shoulders, massaging tensed muscles. Spock leaned back against the Human gratefully.

"Come on," Kirk urged, "let's beam up and have some supper. I've called an early department heads' meeting."

Spock looked up, a warm glint in his eyes. "Still fussing over your errant Vulcan?"

Kirk noted that one brow was arched teasingly. "That's right. Besides, I hate to eat alone." He nodded toward the child. "McCoy will call you if she needs you during the night."

Spock stood and surprised his Captain by admitting to being hungry. "I haven't eaten since breakfast." He bent over the child a moment, adjusting her coverlet and placing a gentle hand on her forehead, then turned back to Kirk. "Let's go, Jim. I'm famished."



"Hello."

The child opened expressive brown eyes and gazed up at her visitor. She started to greet him, but her voice choked into a rasping cough.

"Are you all right?" Spock was concerned.

She made a face. "The water was nasty."

Spock nodded, concurring. "I have good news for you. We have contacted your parents. They were taken some distance away by a rescue team. They'll be here tomorrow."

The child was eager. "When tomorrow?"

"I'm not certain. Late afternoon, I believe."

"Good. I'm tired of waiting."

"They are coming as fast as they can." The Vulcan refrained from adding that the mother had been injured and was waiting to be released from the hospital before seeing her child. It was felt that the little girl had suffered enough trauma and the sight of her mother in less than good condition would needlessly upset her. Spock pulled a stool close to the cot and sat down. His eyes fell on a sheet of paper on the bedside tray. "What's this?"

"I like to draw."

Spock sensed the shyness in her voice. "May I see it?"

There was a pause, then she nodded.

The Vulcan blinked in surprise as he examined the rough, colored picture. Though obviously rendered by a childish hand, it showed a depth of artistic expression and statement that he would have hardly believed possible.

"That's you, up there in the stars," she pointed.

"And below, in the sea?"

She grinned. "That's me, of course. See, you're saving me."

Spock swallowed. In the drawing, the Vulcan's hand reached toward the girl's seemingly about to lift her out of the water and up into the stars.

"It's not finished yet," she told him softly. "I ran out of blue. And I got sleepy..." Again, the nagging cough interrupted her.

"I shall see to it that you get some more colors, if you wish." Spock's voice was gentle.

The girl's eyes closed for a moment. She seemed lost, far away. "Did I ever tell you what my name means?"

"Lestara?"

"It's 'Child of Light'. I was born in the early morning, Mother said. It was the end of all their dark years alone."

"Your parents waited a long time for children?"

She sighed. "Yes. Mother and Father were lonely until I came. They had no tomorrow, they said. Now they do."

Lestara's hand came up to rub at her eyes.

"Do you feel unwell, child?" Her simplicity and innocence had evoked feelings of tenderness in the Vulcan. He welcomed the warmth, the experience of such feelings, yet he was concerned by her lassitude.

"My head hurts a little."

Spock placed his hand on her forehead. Lestara was feverish. Not wishing to upset her, he said, "Perhaps I should allow you to rest." He resolved to have McCoy check on her as soon as possible.

"Okay. I'll try to sleep." She coughed slightly. Her eyes flickered open. "You'll come back and visit me again?"

"Of course, Lestara." The Vulcan hesitated, then drew the covers more securely about her shoulders. The slight smile on the child's lips touched him oddly. She looked so small and fragile, indeed she was, having only been saved from death by the slimmest of margins. Abruptly, Spock turned and went in search of McCoy.

The doctor had been called away on another emergency however, and Spock succeeded only in finding one of the duty nurses. As he instructed her to check on Lestara, his communicator beeped.

"Spock, this is the Captain. We've got to batten down again. There's a new series of quakes due in the lower section of the city."

"I'll meet you there." Spock stole one last glance at the sleeping child, then left the hospital.



When Spock arrived at the lower city, evacuation procedures were in full swing. The Enterprise crew helped keep the citizens calm and organized as they hastily gathered belongings and prepared to vacate their homes before the next predicted quake.

The Captain was conferring with Chief Geologist Ashwab as Spock approached. The Chief moved off and Kirk turned, his face wearing an expression of frustration.

"Damnit, Spock, we're still no closer to an answer to these disturbances. They've caused the populated areas to become so unstable that there's virtually no way to prevent or predict them accurately. The fault line has lengthened,

though. The quakes are moving south, toward the mines. If they start to go we'll have even more trouble on our hands."

By nightfall, Kirk's prediction was realized. The large, northern-most mining town of Elbara was devastated by two successive quakes. The Captain, First Officer and emergency teams from science, security and the medical department were kept occupied for thirty hours handling the casualties. Three main tunnels of the Elbara mine collapsed and hundreds of miners were killed or trapped.

As Spock returned to Lerren in a shuttle overflowing with injured, he admitted to himself what he had tried to conceal from Kirk -- he was tired. He had apparently not been completely convincing; his Captain had ordered him to return in the shuttle so he could rest. Spock had not tried to pretend he wasn't fatigued because of his old code on non-emotionalism. He had simply wanted to remain at Kirk's side. Exhausting though the rescue efforts were, it was good feeling useful to others again, and good interacting with Kirk. And finally, there was the possibility that worried Spock, that Kirk could be hurt during the rescue operations. When Kirk indicated that he would be coming back to Lerren within the hour, Spock had agreed to return.

The rescue efforts and attempting to follow the erratic pattern of seismic disturbances were tiring, but Spock gladly endured the discomfort, he even relished it. He had endured much worse during his studies on Gol -- some things he would prefer to forget -- but that environment was sterile, empty. Here, he was able to live again, starting over, experiencing life to the fullest. He was open, impressionable, eager to touch and be touched by the people and events surrounding him. Simply feeling the everyday emotions felt good.

Spock made his way to the hospital complex, anxious to see Lestara. The child, he admitted, meant much to him. Perhaps it was because he had saved her life, perhaps it was the child-like trust with which she gazed at him, but the Vulcan warmed to the protective feelings she evoked. One part of him still tried to stand a bit aloof, to attempt to analyze the emotions, but for the most part, he simply accepted their rapport and enjoyed it for what it was.

He had not known many children. The Vulcan had always supposed he would not be able to relate well to them, he who was so concerned with matters of science and speculative analysis. Lestara *liked* him though, he realized, really liked him and in the newness of his recent revelations, Spock found himself just child-like enough to recognize that emotion and to respond.

The field hospital was noisy and cluttered with extra beds. Spock made his way down the aisle in the ward, searching for Lestara's cot which had been located near the end of the long room.

He paused. This was where she had lain. Yet the low cot before which he stood was empty. The sheets had been stripped from it and even as he watched, an orderly approached and bent to make up the bed with fresh linen.

Trying not to let his mind leap to frightening conclusions, Spock went in search of McCoy, but again he could not find the Chief Surgeon. The duty nurse responded to his question by checking her clipboard listing of patients.

"I don't see that name here, sir," came the somewhat distracted answer. "Maybe she was moved or -- wait, now I remember." The young nurse met his eyes. "I remember that child, Commander Spock. She was very ill all last night and the day before. Pneumonia. She had so little strength... I'm sorry."

Spock stood silently in the midst of the surrounding confusion, staring into space for long moments after the nurse had excused herself. There was a wrenching deep inside him, a sadness, an oppressive sense of loss and failure. He wanted to turn the emotions off, but they were too heavy, too nameless to be within his conscious control. Yet he feared succumbing to them completely. While he had relished the pleasures of his new life, now he was faced with the other side of emotion.

After a time, the Vulcan simply turned and wandered out of the hospital, no longer seeing or hearing what was going on around him. He was floundering, confused by the sudden onslaught of conflicting needs and feelings.

He knew what he felt was grief and told himself that he should be able to let himself express it. He had thought he was prepared to permit himself his emotions. Yet the depth of the grief shocked him badly. A little girl, a child he hardly knew, died... and he seemed devastated. With a chill, the Vulcan wondered how he might react to a more personal grief. *How can I be sure I won't lose all self-control where Jim's safety is concerned? Control is necessary, a tool for survival. No. It's a trap, a crutch.* The old argument raged within, all the answers he'd thought so obvious became confused again, all the old questions rose to haunt him anew. *Questions... When will I stop asking questions and simply live?*

He walked without direction, leaving the city proper and meandering up into the foothills following a little-used path. There, seated on a boulder where he could watch the sky and wait for dark and the coming of the stars, he tried to still the incessant questioning voices within him. He could not meditate, could not really control. He allowed the heaviest and perhaps most complex of his emotions to take over. Depression settled over him like a smothering cloud and he sat huddled, oblivious to place and time.



The last shuttle back from Elbara settled down on the landing strip near the field hospital. Inside, Kirk gasped involuntarily as the ship touched the ground. The motion jarred his injury, sending waves of white-hot pain down his arm and across his back.

Kirk grimaced and tried to hold his limp left arm steady against his chest as he moved out of his seat. He'd gone down into the mine with the short-handed medical rescue team and as the last of a group of trapped men was being brought out, a cross-beam support had given way, striking Kirk and knocking him down, pinning another, already injured man as well.

Though some of his crew tried to help lift the beam up, Kirk had been in the best position for leverage and had pushed it up with straining back and leg muscles. As the miner was pulled out, the beam slipped again and the Captain had felt a knifing agony as his shoulder dislocated.

Now, he almost staggered as he entered the field hospital. Leaning against a cabinet, he wiped sweat off his brow with his good hand and peered around somewhat anxiously for McCoy.

Finally, the doctor appeared, but Kirk remained where he was. There were others with injuries more serious than his. Though the shoulder dislocation was damned painful, he knew it wasn't serious.

After resting a few moments, the pain subsided a little. McCoy noticed him and walked over.

"Jim, what happened to you?"

Kirk almost shrugged, then thought better of it. "It's not too bad, is it?" he asked instead as McCoy waved his medi-scanner over the injury.

"No. You'll hurt for a while, but there's no serious damage. Come on, we'll..."

"Bones, where's Spock?" Kirk had just become aware of the Vulcan's absence.

McCoy hesitated. "One of my nurses told me that he kind of wandered out of here in a daze after she told him about that little girl."

"Lestara?" Kirk shifted, wincing. The pain in his shoulder seemed to have increased.

McCoy's eyes dropped. "She died. While you two were out at Elbara. Just before her parents arrived. They'd only taken the body out a few moments before Spock came back."

"And you haven't seen him since, is that it?" Kirk couldn't keep the edge out of his voice. "Damn it, Bones. You know he felt something special for that child. Why didn't you --"

"Save her? Jim, I tried. She was very fragile. The pneumonia developed too quickly. There just wasn't any way..."

"Then couldn't you have softened the blow? Prepared him? Helped him?" Kirk paced in agitation. "Damn, I was afraid of something like this. He's still new to this business of expressing his feelings, Doctor, or didn't you think about that?"

McCoy stared at Kirk and when he spoke his voice was low and even. "If you haven't noticed, Captain, things have been a little hectic around here. If I had seen Spock, certainly I would have spoken to him, but I was busy managing to save a few lives at the time he found out."

Kirk closed his eyes and reached with his good hand to cradle his throbbing arm. "Okay, Bones. You've made your point. I'm sorry. I don't know what made me lose my temper like that."

McCoy gave a slight smile and nodded in the direction of Kirk's shoulder. "Extenuating circumstances."

"I'm concerned about Spock, Bones. He must be pretty shaken up. It's not like him to disappear for hours at a time."

McCoy tried to soothe the agitated Human. "He's gone off to work out his feelings, Jim. That doesn't necessarily mean he's in trouble. Would you rather he was back at work, as unaffected as some unemotional android?"

Kirk bit his lip. "No, but I'm still worried. You didn't see him in that water. He was almost frantic and when he finally pulled the girl out and found she was alive, he seemed really worn out, practically disoriented."

McCoy nodded agreement. "He had an emotional investment in the child. He saved her and now she's gone. Tough for anyone to handle... "

"That's just what I mean, Bones." Kirk drew in a breath, again seeing the Vulcan's reaction to the mention of his lost belongings. "Where do you think he might have gone? Did anyone notice which direction he took?"

McCoy told Kirk that the nurse who had spoken to the Vulcan had happened to see him following the old pathway leading to the foothills. No sooner had the doctor indicated the direction, than Kirk was moving past him.

"Whoa, where do you think you're going?"

"I'm going to find him, Bones." Kirk knew his determination carried in his voice and that the doctor would know his mind was made up. "He needs me."

"But what about that shoulder?" McCoy sputtered as he watched Kirk go. "At least let me reduce that dislocation before you go running off... "



The throbbing in Kirk's shoulder had increased to the point that he was seriously considering returning to the hospital without Spock when he finally spotted the Vulcan. Slumped against a tree, the slim figure in grey appeared at first to be merely deep in thought. Then Kirk noticed the frown lines etched in his otherwise expressionless face.

Kirk approached and called his name, but Spock did not respond. Painfully, the Captain moved to his side and spoke again. This time, the Vulcan appeared to have heard, but he still refrained from looking at Kirk as he answered.

"Captain, please. I would prefer to be alone for a while."

"Of course you would. But that won't solve anything, won't change anything."

Spock finally met Kirk's eyes; the tragic expression in them nearly made the Human wince. "No. It will not bring Lestara back."

Kirk had no answer and after a moment, Spock turned his gaze back toward the horizon. Evidently realizing that Kirk wasn't leaving, he asked, "How did you manage to find me?"

Kirk smiled, but the expression faded when Spock didn't look up. "Sometimes it comes in handy to know someone's thought patterns."

Again, silence stretched between them. Kirk shifted uncomfortably, leaning against a rock near the tree. "I understand why you've come out here, Spock. Human's feel like being alone with grief, too. But sometimes talking about it helps."

Spock's voice was a pain-filled rasp. "I feel the pain. Do you require that I demonstrate my feelings? What good is there in lashing out?"

"It's not what I require, Spock, but if you feel like lashing out, why not? It wouldn't mean you're over-reacting. We all have to let go sometimes. Just don't be the way you used to be -- ashamed, afraid to feel, locked away from living by that impossible code you tried to follow. You said feeling was important -- don't you know that peace and happiness and love have no meaning without hurt and sorrow?" Kirk paused, trembling with both sympathetic and real pain. "I said I needed you, and I meant it. The ship needed you as science officer. I needed you emotionally. Can't you let me share this? Let me help... please..."

"Jim." The one word told Kirk that he had been heard, that Spock wasn't sealing himself away from his grief. The pain was there, close to the surface and the Captain could see the inner struggle to assimilate the feelings and deal with them.

"She meant a lot to you, Spock. I know," Kirk soothed. "Of course you're profoundly moved by her death, because you were profoundly moved by her life."

The Vulcan swallowed before attempting speech again. "Her death seems so... senseless. She trusted me, and... Somehow I feel I failed her. She nearly drowned. There is no logic in her surviving the river only to die later on." Spock's face and voice reflected the state of his emotions. He paused for breath, then continued softly. "She told me her name meant 'Child of Light'. Her parents gave her that name because of their great joy that their years of darkness, of waiting for children, had ended. She had such potential, such artistic talent. '*Child of Light*', Jim, and now there can be only the dark."

Kirk chewed his lip thoughtfully for a moment. "Perhaps not total darkness, Spock. Perhaps her life wasn't wasted. Her light shone on you a little while, enough to show you some things you didn't know before."

"And to let me feel emotions I haven't felt."

"That's right, Spock." Kirk tried to sound encouraging as he shifted position to relieve the increasing pain in his shoulder.

"Yet, I do not... it is difficult... to let go, to express my feelings without... wallowing." He grimaced, then went on ruefully. "Old habits are hard to change."

Kirk reached out and clasped Spock's arm. "You're here, with me, not on Gol, not even on the old Enterprise."

The Vulcan's eyes burned into Kirk's. "I'm home."

Slowly, not breaking the eye contact, Kirk nodded.

The words were low, agonized. "Jim... it hurts... "

The Human's grip tightened. He made an attempt to speak reassuringly, to comfort Spock as the grief finally broke free, but the pain he'd ignored too long could not be denied. His voice came out as a strangled moan.

Spock's expression suddenly cleared and he looked closely at Kirk for the first time. He reached out, supportive, concerned. "Jim? You're hurt."

Kirk drew in a breath, tried to speak evenly. "An accident in the mine."

"And why has this not been treated?" Spock's tone sounded a trifle sharp.

"McCoy told me about the little girl. I knew you were... taking it hard."

The Vulcan looked chagrined, slightly annoyed at Kirk, embarrassed, and then an expression of aching tenderness came over his features. Without speaking, he eased Kirk into a sitting position against the tree. Gentle fingers touched the Human's throbbing shoulder, probing with utmost care.

In spite of himself, Kirk flinched.

"Be still." Spock's voice was stern, but choked with emotion. "Please, Jim... let me... "

Kirk heard the naked entreaty in the words and saw that the Vulcan's lips trembled. Spock had been on the brink of catharsis and Kirk was annoyed that his own physical condition had interfered. Then sky-rocketing pain blocked out everything else.

Warm fingers came to rest briefly at Kirk's temple and a sudden lightness replaced the all-encompassing pain. Then the Vulcan's strong hands moved quickly, taking a firm grip on Kirk's arm. He pulled and the shoulder snapped back into place.

Kirk went limp with the suddenness of relief. He let out the breath he'd been holding and looked up at Spock. "It's better now."

The Vulcan's eyes were bright with undefinable emotion as he regarded Kirk. "Now that the dislocation is reduced, your pain will not be as great." Sensitive fingers lingered over the shoulder area, examining strained tendons and muscles. Spock pulled off his own tunic and, now wearing only the blue Vulcan shirt and his uniform trousers, proceeded to tear the silver-grey fabric into strips. Without speaking further, he bound Kirk's arm across his chest.

The gentle touch was in sharp contrast to Spock's brooding intensity and Kirk tried to lighten the mood. "Seems you're pretty good at first aid, which will probably cause McCoy to be properly annoyed when we get back."

Spock answered a bit distractedly. "As science officer, I have had to make myself acquainted with all areas of science, including medicine." Finally finishing, he lifted his gaze to Kirk. The deepset eyes were warm and untroubled, his lips curved into a slight smile. "I... feel much better now, too."

"Ready to go back?"

For answer, Spock slid his arm around Kirk's right side and lifted him to his feet. The Captain swayed slightly, suddenly light-headed. He felt Spock's hand against his temple once more, but could not connect any particular physical sensation with the act. The gesture was soothing however, and he leaned for a moment against the Vulcan's supportive strength.

Spock's voice, whisper-soft, came to his ear. "When I knew what I felt was grief, I was concerned about my possible reactions to finding you hurt or... or losing you, Jim. My fear of feelings such as that nearly destroyed... what we once had. For a little while, I did not know if the course I had chosen when we spoke in Sickbay was truly the wisest for me. You saw how I reacted to the emotional subject of my possessions. I could not prevent retreating into the rigid self control I had always practiced. I feared I could find no way to deal with emotion -- I would either remain stoic and cut myself off from all feelings, or else succumb completely to pathos."

"You saved that child, Spock. You hurt when she died. But you didn't let the hurt consume you." Kirk gingerly touched his upper arm. "You found a way to express your feelings."

Spock raised an eyebrow, considering, and appeared to agree. Then, he looked anxiously at Kirk, assessing his condition. "Will you be able to travel back to the hospital?"

"I think so. After all... you'll be here to help me, won't you?"

"As you are here to help me, Jim. I thank you."

Together, they headed back to see McCoy.



CAPTAIN'S LOG, STARDATE 9730.25: *The earthquakes on Emery IV have finally been brought under control. Illegal mining operations along a fault line set off the chain reaction of seismic activity. As of this date, we have left a medical/geological/security team there to aid the population is recovering from the effects of the quakes. Enterprise is continuing the remaining phase of her interrupted shake-down cruise and awaiting orders from Starfleet Command as to our next mission.*

Kirk clicked off the recorder and carefully leaned back in his seat. Four days after his accident, he could still feel a twinge in his shoulder. *Seems to be improving, though, he decided, at least McCoy's taken me off the pain medication.* The Captain had spent a lot of time soaking in whirlpool baths and resting under sonic treatment while allowing the stretched and abused tendons and muscles to heal. After all the activity and confusion on Emery IV, things seemed to have settled down into a relaxed, if not yet dull, routine.

He checked the chronometer. *Nineteen hundred hours; Spock should be back in his quarters by now and finished with his duties for the day.* The Captain picked up the large, rectangular package on his desk and, carrying it under his good arm, proceeded out of his cabin and crossed the short distance to Spock's.

The First Officer answered the buzzer at once. Kirk entered to find Spock working on something at his desk. He looked up and, greeting Kirk cordially, motioned to him to approach.

Kirk noted that the rooms remained as they had before the mission to Emery IV. He recalled his conversation with Spock on the subject of his personal effects and the painful memories the Vulcan still harbored on the issue. Perhaps the parcel he carried would begin to help remedy the situation in Spock's cabin.

The Vulcan had returned to the task occupying him, oblivious to Kirk's train of thought and the object he carried.

"You chose an excellent moment to visit," he pronounced finally, once again looking up at Kirk.

"I did? What's that you're working on?"

Spock turned over the object on his desk and Kirk could see that it was a drawing he had been in the process of framing. Curious, he moved closer to examine it.

"Lestara did it." Spock responded to his unspoken question. "Apparently McCoy told her parents of the circumstances of her rescue and they sent the drawing -- her last -- to me as a keepsake."

Kirk studied the picture, touched by the parent's gesture. It seemed to be more than just a child's drawing; the faces were alive with a luminous light. Looking at Spock's face, Kirk knew the Vulcan thought it quite the loveliest piece of art he had ever seen.

"You're going to hang it, of course." Kirk made it a statement.

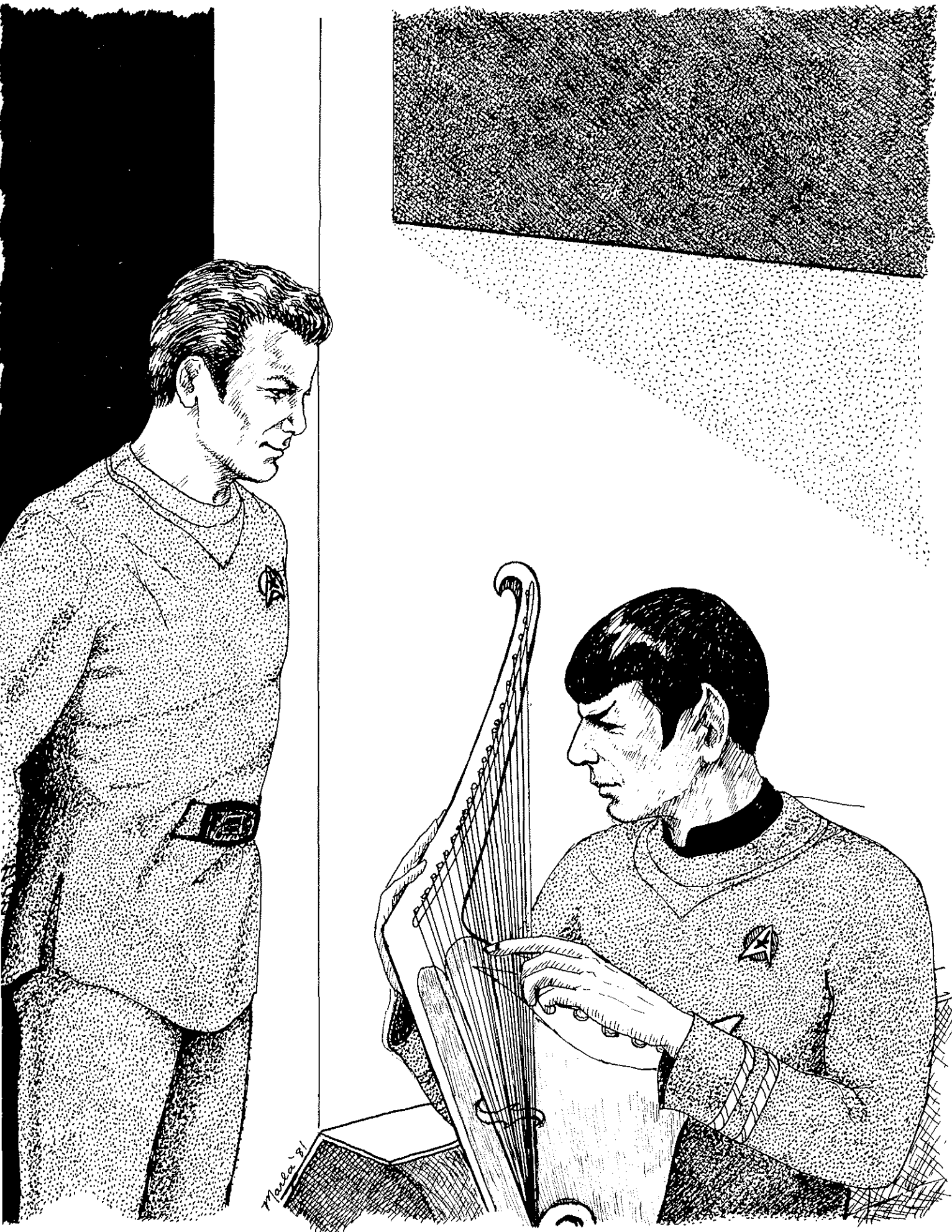
"Will you help me choose a suitable location?"

After a few moments of discussion and testing several possible sites, the picture was finally placed on the wall across from the lounge in the sleeping alcove. The two stood back to admire it.

"Well, it certainly helps to improve the looks of the place." Kirk glanced at Spock out of the corner of his eye.

The Vulcan did not appear troubled by his reference to the lack of decor. "Indeed."

"Oh, I almost forgot." Kirk went to retrieve the package he had placed on the desk and handed it to Spock.



"What is this?" The Vulcan was puzzled. Kirk just smiled.

Spock sat on the orange lounge to open the package. His attitude spoke of curiosity, but when the carton was opened, his utter amazement gave way to an expression of pure joy. He sat, simply staring for a moment, then reached to pull the polished wooden object from its case. Cradling the Vulcan lyrette in his arms, he touched the strings reverently, causing a few simple, beautiful notes to sound in the quiet room.

"Jim."

Kirk moved to stand close to him. The emotion in Spock's voice was nearly tangible. For a moment, a charged silence descended, then Kirk explained.

"Uhura helped me get it. She knew exactly what kind to order for you."

Spock's eyes when he looked up at Kirk were moist and very deep. "You had this sent from Vulcan."

Kirk nodded. "I wanted it to be like... to be right." *Like your other one*, he had started to say.

Spock was too overcome with delight at the new instrument to let Kirk's slip remind him of his hurt at losing the old. He rose and crossed the room, placing the gleaming lyrette on the shelf beneath the recently hung picture. Then he turned to Kirk, holding the Human with his eyes. "A gift of such beauty and thoughtfulness is truly moving. I deeply appreciate it... Thank you, Jim."

Kirk smiled. The words may have been formal, but the tone was definitely not. The Vulcan turned to let his fingers caress the shining wood surface once again. "How could I ever have thought this place was not my home?" he wondered aloud.

Kirk was not sure whether Spock meant the old Enterprise or this newer, changed ship, but it really didn't matter. "You know," he mused, coming to stand at Spock's side, "the place is getting to look like home to me, too."

"I remember an ancient Vulcan verse," Spock went on quietly, quoting, "'*Bazfal taz'nu mal, maxord bevul*'. 'Home is a circle of warmth, wherever it may be.'"

Kirk looked up at him, noting the serene expression on his face, a serenity truly achieved now, with no echoes of past regrets or pain. "That's our Enterprise," the Human whispered, "a home that travels with us, keeps us safe and sane."

Spock met Kirk's eyes in true communion. "We have the best of both worlds, it seems. The galaxy at our doorstep, and..." his fingers settled lightly on Kirk's shoulder, "... a home such as this."





Universal Delight

There's a place up there I'd like to share;
On a long starlight ride.
A friendship rare, where two people care;
Captain and Vulcan, side by side.

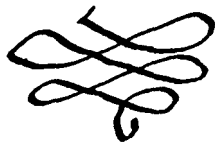
A starship command and logic's demand;
And space forever free;
And where no man has gone before;
And places he'll never see.

Where infinite beauty can be found;
In the most unlikely places;
And life is diverse in the universe;
And love has many faces.

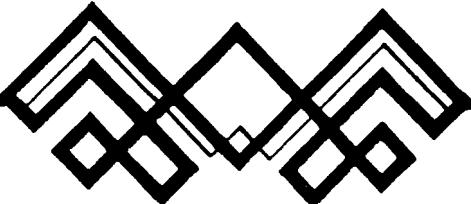
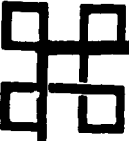
The last frontier, you never hear;
Of any other place;
Where hearts are won and kingdoms lost;
In the star-strewn paths of space.

The places I've been and the things I've seen
No man could comprehend;
Where man can go, eternally free;
And the universe never ends.

GB



Kari Masoner



THE CHANGEING

Cynthia Drake

Sterilize. . . sterilize;

The word, the concept

lies like a lump of cold metal in my brain,
setting my thoughts on edge.

Cold -- so cold.

I am alone in my quarters.

The others are in the rec room (As usual, Captain, your
buoyancy is affecting all.

You are delighted with yourself and your success
as well you should be.

He was brilliant.)

No machine can cool the warmth you bring.

It is. . . fortunate for me that you were there
when Nomad took over my mind,

filling my brain with the one pounding destructive thought.

I was terrified - falling - a small portion of myself screaming. . .

You caught me, clutched at me, shouted my name,

and I could feel your fear - as great as my own - feeding my own
hysteria, starting to claim my last remnant of sanity,

but you changed, gained control of yourself.

Recognizing my helplessness

you turned your anger on Nomad, ordering it to stop

while at the same time your hold on me altered,

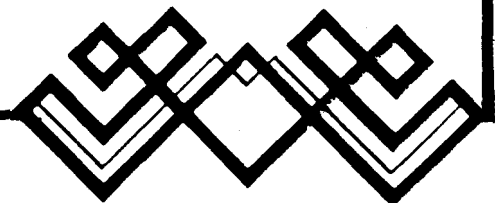
enfolding rather than grabbing,

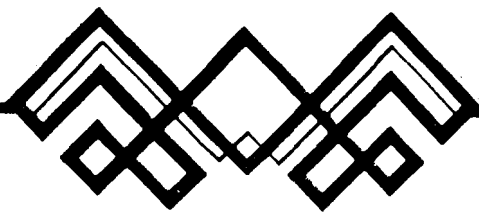
comforting, consoling,

managing at the same time to convey your absolute authority to Nomad
and your absolute love to me.



Then the pressure was gone
and I collapsed, drained.
Still you held me, almost carrying me out of the room
as quickly as you could,
holding me up, bracing me,
listening attentively to my outpouring of information,
maintaining your hold until you were sure of my recovery.
I am most grateful to you.
For a while, afterwards,
the rush to destroy the machine dominated all else.
But as soon as it was over your spirits rose,
even as I became aware of the pressure still upon me.
I declined your invitation to join you for dinner.
I think you understood, for you waved the others ahead,
put both hands on my shoulders again
and looked searchingly into my eyes.
"Are you sure you're all right?"
Close physical contact with you tends to make me rather breathless
for no apparent reason,
and all I could do was nod.
"Okay," you looked doubtful,
but gave me a final squeeze before turning to go.
"One thing," you swung around,
"I don't like the way you look.
If you need me tonight - for any reason whatsoever
you call me. Whatever time it is."
"Captain, I assure you. . ."
"Never mind that. I want your word that you'll call me."
"Very well," I conceded. "You have my word."
That sounded somewhat ungracious, so I added, "Thank you, sir."
You stiffened momentarily at the title, which I used deliberately
to remind us both of who we are - you, my commanding officer
and I - a Vulcan.
Your smile, gentle, accepting. . . your voice,
"I'll hold you to that, Commander,"
they haunt me now.





Thinking of you has helped
but I am so tired.

Any mind meld is exhausting
and this one will not let me go.

The coldness still pervades my brain,
threatening to take over completely;
pounding, freezing, 'til I think I shall go mad.

Again and again I try to withdraw into the sleep I must have
and time and again I am wrenched back up to consciousness
by the same jarring presence.

It is so late - nearly morning.

I go on duty in four hours.

Some respite must be found before. . .

hesitantly my hand touches the intercom stud,
your private frequency,
part of me disbelieving the effrontery,
wanting to cut off the signal before. . . you answer,
voice fuzzed with sleep.

"Kirk here."

"Jim?" I can barely hear my own voice. Yours sharpens with anxiety.

"Spock? What's wrong?"

Surprisingly easy, after all, to say the words.

"I need you. Please?"

"On my way. Kirk out."

You are at my door in minutes - I have already unlocked it
and you do not buzz, but stride right in.

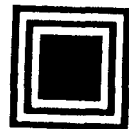
I look at you mutely, unable to put words to the horror
but you have never needed to hear me speak,
seemingly able to read my thoughts.

Your hands on my arms, supportive yet demanding.

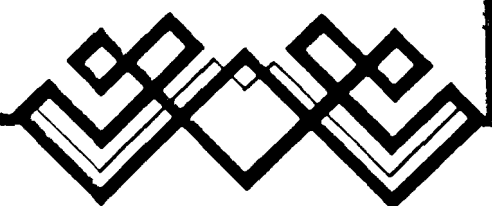
"Tell me."

I attempt it, faltering, unsure,
yet somehow stumbling through a halting description. . .
the cold, the pain - the fear.

You listen and your eyes soften, warm;
you pull me close, the feel of you at once a shock to my nerves



and a tranquilizer to my brain.
But the cold is still there, a sickening intrusion
and trying to escape it, I press closer to you,
bury my face in your neck, shudders owning me,
terrified anew at this involuntary surrender of my greatest pride,
my self-control, my dignity, my. . . and you,
what must you think of this disgraceful display?
I try to apologize, to excuse, even to pull away,
but your hand in my hair presses my head back down,
muffling my words into obscurity in the sweet scent of your skin;
your other hand rubbing my back, hugging me hard.
Your voice calm, loving.
"It's okay, it's okay, oh don't, don't, don't. . . "
soothing me into quiet, filling the frigid places with yourself,
dissolving the metallic residue of the meld
until it is quite gone,
and I lie limp against you.
The feel of you easing me back into the pillows
bringing me down with you,
pulling something warm and heavy over both of us,
your voice in my ear following me down the path
into oblivion -- all beautiful.
"Sleep now - it's all right, all you need is a little rest.
There's nothing to worry about.
I'm here and I'll stay.
We're both off-duty tomorrow - I fixed it,
so sleep as long as you want - I'll be here when you wake up."
I try to protest, to tell you it is not fitting for you
to spend the night here - like this,
but you won't listen.
"Shh, shh, it's all right. Believe me. Go to sleep."
Your hand tugs my hair lightly, reinforcing the command
and, obedient, I allow the warm darkness to take me,
my last conscious awareness of the delightful coolness of you
against me, lips brushing my forehead
then there is nothing.





GAR

Thy Answer Lies Elsewhere

O errant son of Vulcan - here thee stand,
At pains to prove thyself, to find thy place
At Gol. In spite of thy half-Human brand,
We Masters gave permission to embrace
The Kolínahr. We've watched thy progress
Since, and even, I, High Master, have been pleased
Thy mastery of the rituals does evince
Such strength that now the doubters are
Appeased. But here, with logic's symbol in my
Hands, thee halt the act Tradition has
Decreed. I touch thy mind, hear far-off
Earth's commands: One voice of logic,
One of Human need.

I feel the alien's force, hear Human sound;
Within that mix, thy answer will be found.

Barbara L. Storey

GB

A Different Drummer



Beverly Volker
& Nancy Kippax

FOR RUSS --

WHOSE IDEA STARTED THE DRUMBEAT.

WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE.

IF A MAN DOES NOT KEEP PACE WITH HIS COMPANIONS,
PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE HE HEARS A DIFFERENT DRUMMER.
LET HIM STEP TO THE MUSIC HE HEARS,
HOWEVER MEASURED OR FAR AWAY.

- THOREAU -

Chapter One

Night had fallen aboard the Enterprise. The corridors were nearly deserted at this hour and the lighting had been dimmed. In the Captain's quarters, however, time made no difference. James T. Kirk and his First Officer were seated at Kirk's desk, bent over twin porta-viewers, tapes and logs covering the broad surface. Empty coffee cups and the remnants of a meal hastily consumed some hours previously were piled on a third chair a few feet away.

Wearily, Kirk rubbed at the bridge of his nose and flexed his shoulders. The action was not lost on the Vulcan.

"It *is* getting late," he observed, watching Kirk. "Perhaps we should leave the rest of this for the morning..."

Kirk considered. "Well, let's give it another hour and then we'll quit. When we arrive at the Goodhope Colony tomorrow, our cover must be absolutely perfect."

Spock sighed. He, of course, had already committed all of the available data to memory, and this last-minute cramming seemed unnecessary. The Captain, however, had pointed out that Spock was sometimes less than effective in undercover situations, citing a number of past *faux pas* on the part of the First Officer. Now, with the current mission depending on the acting ability of the two of them, Kirk wasn't taking any chances.

The Vulcan stood, stretching cramped muscles. "More coffee, Jim?"

Kirk nodded. "Thanks."

Selecting another cassette, he slipped it into his viewer. This one was a microfilm deposition from a woman named Chara Loring. He read quietly for a moment, accepting the cup from Spock without comment.

LORING: I was urged to join the others at Goodhope, but I didn't know if I were ready to make a commitment that complete. I believe in Diogenes and his teaching, but... I don't know, I guess I'm still too materialistic and egotistical.

QUESTION: Have you ever visited the Goodhope Colony, Ms. Loring?

LORING: No. But I have received tapes from my fellowbeings there. They've found the contentment. It's beautiful.

QUESTION: Have they ever indicated that they cannot leave, that they are being held against their will?

LORING: Of course not! That's utterly ridiculous. Against their will? There can be no will except for the common good of all. We are the spirit of unity, all are one.

Kirk flicked off the tape and took a sip of the hot, stimulating beverage. While Chara Loring professed faith in the idyllic situation at Goodhope Colony, others did not. The collection of data included reports that were much less flattering.

The Goodhope Colony had been authorized by the Federation almost three solar years ago, and located on the planet Albion 7, a harsh, less-than-desirable site for colonization. The multi-racial group were the followers of a philosopher-teacher who called himself Diogenes.

One final time, Kirk slipped in the photodisc of the charismatic leader. Diogenes, who had started life as Quentin Hale, had been born on the Terran colony on Vega. Little information was known about him, except for the standard records, until seven years ago, when he had begun his interstellar crusade for unity and peace.

Pensively, Kirk studied the tall, sinewy Human, wondering what it was about this man who drew people like a magnet. Kirk had learned the basics of his philosophy and found his principles to be noble and good, but there had been others with just such a vision, others who had strived to perfect the goals of the Federation, and they had not attracted such a wide following.

Spock noticed his Captain's preoccupation with the picture and he spoke softly. "He does appear trustworthy."

"Looks can be deceiving," Kirk countered. "But that's what this mission is all about - to determine if some of the accusations against him are true or not. We'll keep an open mind."

"Will six weeks be long enough?"

"It will have to be. Starfleet expects our report, and the Enterprise can only tarry in this sector for so long. There aren't that many stars to chart and map around here." He leaned back, forcing his attention away from the photo image.

Two weeks ago they had been contacted by Starfleet Central and ordered to Starbase 14 for a special, high-priority briefing. There was a growing concern over the isolated colony on Albion 7. Several faithful followers had defected with horror stories of brutal and inhumane treatment, charges ranging from minor infractions of Federation policy to gross negligence. Yet the unsubstantiated claims could not be accepted without proper investigation, for Diogenes was widely respected within the Federation. Starfleet elected to be discreet - to place two operatives into the organization as members.

The Vulcan-Terran Spock possessed a perfect genetic cover. Because the unity movement included many bi-racial sociological misfits, Spock could pose as a likely candidate and would be easily accepted in Goodhope. Kirk was precisely the kind of incisive, open-minded type Starfleet wanted for the job, but his cover was a little more difficult to arrange. It was decided that a fake "discharge" from the military organization, a dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic "bigotry" would send a man like Kirk seeking the principles espoused by Diogenes. Together, they would request entry into Goodhope Colony and determine what, if anything, was going on.

Spock noted Kirk's controlled exterior, fascinated at the metamorphosis the Human seemed to undergo every time he was required to play a specific part. Kirk, he believed, would have made a consummate actor. He smiled slightly, fondly, as he reached over and clicked off Kirk's viewer.

"Enough, Jim. May I suggest we retire. You ordered the final briefing of all senior officers for 0700. That is only 6.2 hours away."

Kirk smiled, amused. "You're beginning to sound like McCoy," he accused.

Spock deliberately raised an eyebrow in mock indignation. "I see no logic in fatigue making you insulting, Captain." He stood to leave.

"Good night, Commander. Sleep well." Kirk smiled again as he saw the Vulcan to the door. Spock was right, he reflected. They needed their rest, for tomorrow would make many demands on them.

* * * *

"I don't like it," McCoy grumbled as he walked to the shuttle bay with his Captain and First Officer. Kirk grinned.

"You never like it, Bones, when Spock and I have to take a mission without you. You're not happy unless you're there to keep an eye on us," he teased.

"Yeah, well, you usually require an eye kept on you."

"Doctor, your concern sometimes exceeds even the most disciplined dedication to duty, the most loyal requirements of subordination, the most profound confirmation of friendship," Spock extolled; Kirk could hardly control his amusement. The Vulcan continued,

"Goodhope is founded on love, acceptance, honesty - all the virtues which most cultures, including your own, revere - yet even in a place like that, you are apprehensive about us going alone."

McCoy scowled. "You're damn right, Spock, because you and Jim could get into trouble at a Federation tea party, and I have to be the one who repairs any damage you manage to incur. Besides, if Goodhope is so lovely, why does the Federation feel the need to investigate it? I'll tell you why - because something's going on there, and you two won't be satisfied until you're in the middle of it!"

They had reached the bay doors and Kirk pressed the buttons to pressurize. "That's why we need you here on the ship. We'll only be able to transmit, not receive messages. You have to psych-evaluate those messages, decide if we're okay or trying to tell you something but can't speak in front of someone. There's talk of brainwashing and behavior modification - only you can tell if anything is happening to us by our reports. But, Bones, remember this: You can ruin the whole mission if you react incorrectly or prematurely. If you pull us out before we learn anything, Spock and I will be useless in a repeat attempt. We'll be known in Goodhope. Keep in mind, too, that there have been more favorable reports about the colony and Diogenes than there have been negative stories. We could find Goodhope to be a new Eden in the Federation."

"I never knew an Eden that didn't have its serpent," McCoy commented.

"Just be very certain before you take any action, Bones." The doors opened and Kirk put a hand on McCoy's arm. "We're counting on you to use discretion, but get our asses out if we get into trouble."

The three men shared a warm lingering look, then McCoy smiled and nodded his assurance. Kirk and Spock headed toward the waiting spacecraft and the bay doors slid closed again. McCoy stared at them.

'Don't let us get into trouble, but if we do, wait until the last possible moment before you pull us out... and be prepared to justify your actions if you do...' McCoy scowled. *Yes, Jim-boy, Captain and friend, sometimes you do ask too much of us.*

Sighing, McCoy left the shuttle bay.

* * * *

The private, interstellar spacecraft which had been stored in the hangerdeck for the journey to the Albion star system, now carried its two passengers to the seventh planet from the sun. Kirk and Spock, dressed in casual civilian clothing, found the manipulation of the ship's controls a welcome distraction. Each was equipped with a tiny, one-way transmitter, concealed in the seam of their clothing and, as an extra precaution, a transponder implanted under the skin that morning by McCoy. The transmitters would enable them to send periodic reports back to the Enterprise and if anything went wrong their orders were to abort the mission. If all went well, they would be back aboard in six weeks.

"I find it interesting," Kirk remarked, "that almost a thousand people have selected Goodhope as a viable alternative lifestyle."

"Nine hundred and forty seven, by last census, Cap... Jim." Spock quickly corrected the slip of the tongue. From here on, ranks would not be used.

Kirk nodded. "Yes, and that's only the number of followers who reside here. Diogenes' supporters are estimated to number close to 150,000 on worlds throughout the galaxy. Everywhere he goes, people flock to hear him speak."

"His ideas do contain merit. It will be interesting to see if the philosophy can truly be made to work."

After a moment, the Vulcan announced, "Entering atmosphere of Albion 7."

Kirk pushed the communications button. "This is Liberty, Federation Registration KS 4234 to Goodhope Colony. Request permission to land. Over."

"Welcome to Goodhope, Liberty. What is your business? Over."

* * * *

The landing pad was located on the crest of a hill overlooking the colony. As Kirk and Spock emerged from their craft, they were treated to a panoramic view of the site. Neat, symmetrical rows of thatch-covered dwellings formed the center, with concentric rings of furrowed land laid out with careful planning surrounding the village.

Federation reports had referred to Albion 7 as "harsh" - Kirk saw now that it was an understatement. The air was very dry and the climate was warm, but not hot. There were no trees or flowers in sight, only a sparse scattering of straw-like grass clumped between rock.

Kirk turned to Spock. "Why would anyone elect to establish a colony here?"

"What is more curious, Jim, is that Goodhope is virtually self-sustaining. They have received very few off-planet supplies, according to the records. How do they manage to grow enough food to feed more than nine hundred people?"

"Look." Kirk pointed to where an all-terrain vehicle was moving toward them. In a moment it came to rest a few feet from the landing pad and the driver emerged.

He was shorter than average height, with dark, unruly hair. Brushing the road dust from his grey coverall, he approached the two.

"I am Caldin," he announced, reaching for their hands.

Kirk introduced himself and Spock, returning the man's handshake.

"Come, let's sit down," Caldin invited, and to Kirk's surprise, he settled himself comfortably on the ground. Kirk and Spock followed his example.

They were asked a number of questions - why they wanted to join Goodhope, what they expected to find, where they had heard of Diogenes, what their philosophy was. Caldin seemed particularly interested to learn that they had once been Starfleet personnel. As they gave the prepared, rehearsed answers, Kirk studied the man. His skin tone was a peculiar shade, a deep yellow-orange that suggested a mixed racial heritage. Caldin's eyes, although small, were an arresting violet-blue. He had grown a full beard, as unkempt as his hair.

Finally, satisfied, Caldin stood up. "You both seem sincere. I will take you to Diogenes."

Kirk hesitated as he led them toward the open land vehicle. "What about our ship - our things?"

Caldin smiled tolerantly. "Relax, gentlemen, this is Goodhope. No one here will bother them. Later, if you decide to stay, we can return for what you will need."

With a last glance at the Liberty, Kirk followed.

* * * *

Kirk and Spock sat on the porch of the small, white-painted house and waited. Caldin had been inside for twenty minutes. They did not speak to each other, but their eyes were busy observing their surroundings. Several children were playing a game nearby, their laughter and exuberance universal in children throughout the galaxy. A young woman, barefoot and simply dressed, appeared, interrupting the game. Apparently an older sister, she scolded one of the children about neglecting his chores, then ushered him away behind the house. When the errant boy had gone, the children resumed their play.

Presently Caldin came through the door and Kirk and Spock turned at his approach.

"Come in. Diogenes will see you now."

The inside of the house was cool and dark, shades drawn against the heat of the afternoon sun. The main room was furnished plainly and seemed to be an office. There were several wooden chairs, stools, two work tables and some file cabinets. At one end of the room was a cot and small table with a pitcher and basin. The floor was bare. At the other end of the room was a massive desk, the top of it filled with clutter. The man behind it was not dwarfed by its size.

He rose as Kirk and Spock entered and they were at once aware that the films they had viewed had not done him justice. He was well over six feet tall, slim but not gaunt. His hair was pale yellow, shoulder length, and he was dressed in a short-sleeved plain white tunic over white trousers. The most compelling thing about him was his face. Handsome in a classical way, his eyes were a soft green, his lips slightly full, revealing even white teeth as he smiled. His whole demeanor inspired a sense of simplicity and sincerity. He moved around the desk to Kirk and Spock.

"You are welcome in Goodhope, gentlemen. I am Diogenes. How may we help you?" He reached a hand to Kirk, his voice genuine. Kirk took the firm clasp.

"I am James Kirk, Mr. Diogenes. This is my friend, Spock. We explained to your man, Caldin. We are seeking to join your colony."

Diogenes addressed the man who had brought them. "That will be all, Caldin. You may leave." As Caldin exited, he returned his gaze to Kirk. "It is just 'Diogenes'. We do not use titles in Goodhope," he corrected. Then he turned to Spock. "You are a Vulcan, Spock. There are not many from your planet here." His tone expected an explanation.

"I am half-Vulcan," Spock answered. "My mother is from Earth."

Diogenes nodded, satisfied by Spock's words and turned back to Kirk. "Caldin said you told him you were former Starfleet. You are no longer with the service?"

"No." Kirk made the word sound bitter, fencing, but offered no more.

Diogenes gazed at him for a few seconds, then apparently decided to press no further. "Why do you want to join Goodhope?"

"We have heard that the colony offers things that we have found lacking elsewhere."

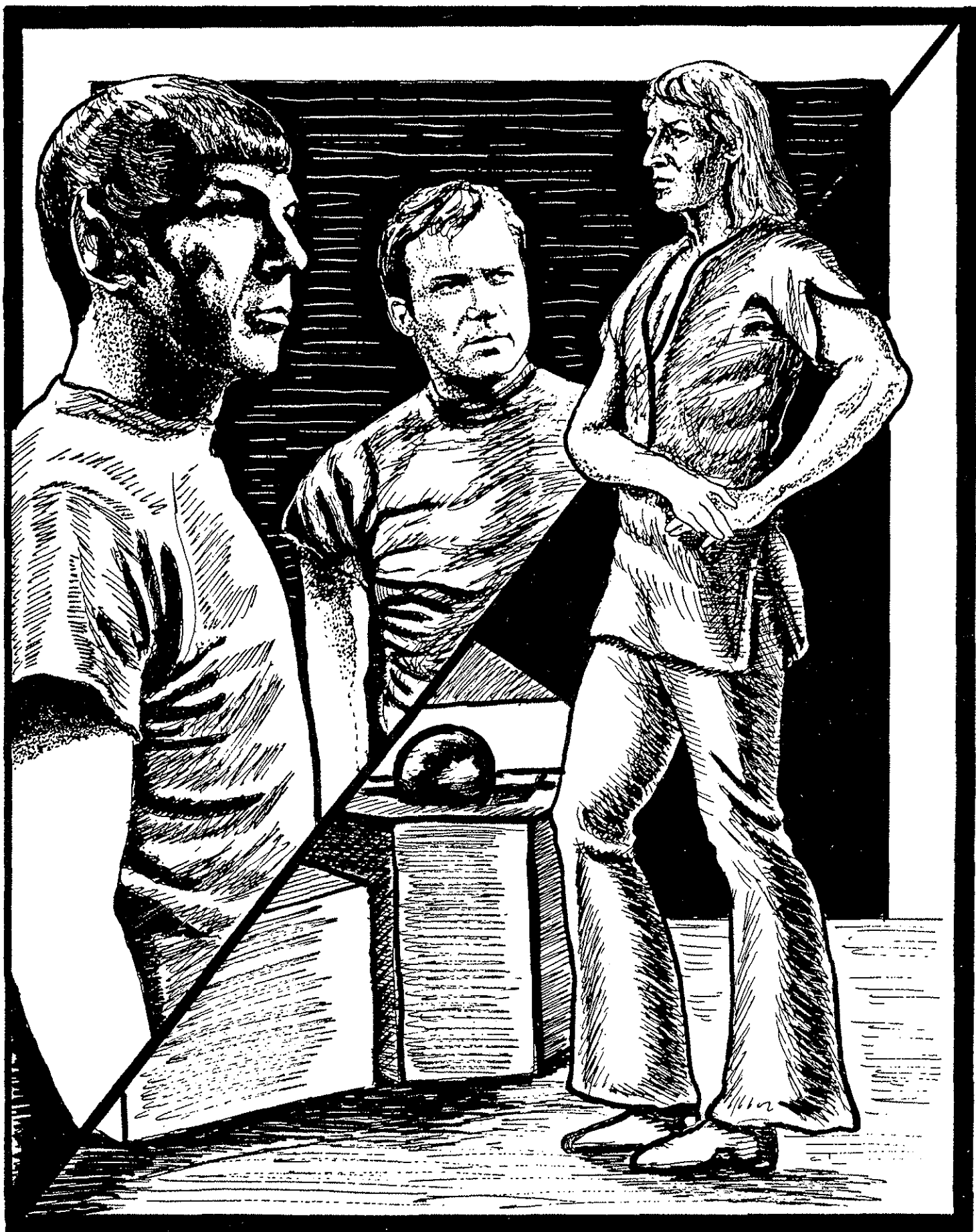
Diogenes laughed. "Hardly, my friend. We have a simple life here. As someone who has traveled the galaxy, you have certainly seen many places with far more material wealth than we."

"I wasn't referring to material wealth," Kirk claimed.

Diogenes laugh softened into a smile. He indicated the chairs. "Please forgive me for my thoughtlessness. Won't you sit down."

Kirk and Spock sat on two of the wooden chairs. Diogenes returned to his desk. He took out three metal cups and poured liquid into them from a jug. Then, bringing the cups around, he handed one each to Kirk and Spock and kept the third himself.

"A synthetic fruit drink," he said, seating himself in a chair close to them. "Not very tasteful, I'm afraid, but it is cool and wet. The air is very dry here."



Kirk sipped at the bland-tasting drink. Diogenes smiled at Spock. "Perhaps you won't mind that so much. I understand Vulcan is quite dry, also."

Spock nodded. "But much hotter."

"I have never been there," Diogenes admitted, then abruptly turned his attention back to Kirk. "What *do* you expect to find in Goodhope, James? Is that what you are called? I want you to feel comfortable."

Kirk was caught off-guard for a second by the man's line of question. "Jim," he answered. "I prefer Jim."

"Well, Jim, tell me all about why you have come here."

Kirk remembered the rehearsed cover story. "I've spent half my life in Starfleet, one of the Federation's emissaries to other worlds. I've seen things, been expected to do things that have made me ill. When I acted on my own, tried to rectify unhealthy situations, I met with resistance from bureaucracy and government chains of command. The Federation, the Starfleet, teaches one philosophy and practices another."

"This colony is a Federation grant, Jim," Diogenes reminded.

Kirk tried another tack. "I believe there is more to life than the system gives. The government claims equality, unity, acceptance for all, but it's not so. There is prejudice and bigotry and a man is trapped in an expected role. If he does not conform, he is discriminated against, made to feel that he is not acceptable to society."

Diogenes gauged Kirk carefully before he spoke. Then, "I find it hard to believe that you would feel this kind of difficulty."

Kirk felt Spock's eyes on him. He leaned forward, making his voice earnest. "Diogenes, I have listened to some of your preaching. I have studied your philosophy. You know what I'm talking about. You understand the plight of those who feel alienated from society, for whatever reason. I believe you have found a way to bring out the best in mankind. I would like to learn more."

Again Diogenes studied Kirk thoughtfully, then he turned to the Vulcan. "And you, Spock, do you also feel alienated from society?"

Spock's answer was immediate. "I have lived my life half-Vulcan, half-Human, belonging to neither world. Is it not evident that I have encountered difficulties in such an existence?"

"The Vulcans teach total logic. Have you not accepted their philosophy?" Diogenes asked.

"Their logic, therefore their philosophy, is flawed when applied to one who is not consistent with their breeding," Spock replied, and Kirk looked at him abruptly, caught by the note of truth in his words.

Diogenes observed the look, then leaned back in his chair. "Perhaps you would both like to learn a little more about us before you decide that our way of life is what you want."

Kirk considered. "We have not found what we seek anywhere else in the galaxy."

"And you may not find it here," Diogenes told him. "Our life is not easy. We are often faced with a shortage of food, supplies. I worry constantly that we will not be able to continue to sustain all those who have elected to join us."

"We're not afraid to do our part," Kirk assured. "Hard work is not a deterrent."

Diogenes smiled warmly. "Very admirable, Jim, and we can definitely use all the able bodies that offer. But I cannot ask that of you until you are certain. You are welcome to stay, to share what little we have, and we will be grateful for any assistance you may want to contribute. I will not pretend pride. We do have many needs. For now, however, I ask only that you listen and learn with an open heart. When you are sure, we shall discover how we may help each other."

"Fair enough," Kirk agreed.

Diogenes stood up and Kirk and Spock rose with him. "It is nearly time for me to address the colony. We come together twice each day to learn more of our life. Come with me now, and you will begin to hear, also. Afterward, I will have Caldin find you a place to sleep. If you have any personal belongings, he will show you where to put them. If you have anything of value I would prefer you allow me to put them safely away. To learn how we live, it will be best for you to experience the same kind of existence."

"We have a few things." Kirk met his eyes.

Diogenes reached out and took each of them by the hand, squeezing tightly. "Jim, Spock, I welcome you here. I truly hope we can give you what you seek." He dropped their hands and crossed to the door. "Come."

As the two officers followed, Kirk felt a bad taste in his mouth and wondered why he disliked being dishonest with this man.

* * * *

Diogenes led them down a man-made path behind the house. A few yards down, they were joined by Caldin, who fell into step beside the colony leader. He glanced briefly at the other men, then launched into conversation with Diogenes. He spoke in whispers so that they could not hear, but his manner indicated something was wrong. Diogenes responded quietly, nodding or shaking his head. He, too, kept his voice low, and although it was plain that he was not pleased by Caldin's words, his reaction was calm. As they continued to walk, he put an arm around Caldin, seeming to forget the two men behind. He was apparently reassuring, for Caldin visibly relaxed.

At that moment, they arrived at a large area, obviously constructed as a gathering place. It was not enclosed, but covered by some sort of metallic roof held up by wooden poles every five or six meters. At the end closest to them was a large, intricately carved podium - the most ornate thing seen since their arrival - elevated by a platform about a meter high. While Kirk had been observing the interaction between Diogenes and Caldin on their way here, Spock had been taking in the surroundings, and wondering why he had seen no colonists about. Now he had his answer.

The Rotunda was packed with about eight or nine hundred men, women and children. Most sat on the bare ground, a few on coarse cushions or rugs, and still fewer on three rows of benches. They were representative of many races in the galaxy, but all were humanoid, able to exist in the natural environment of the planet. They looked poor, underfed, badly clothed, yet Spock was at once aware of an emotional electricity that charged the air. These people were experiencing an exhilaration that did not manifest itself in their outward appearance. All of them faced the direction of the podium, waiting.

As they arrived, Diogenes turned from Caldin, flashing a reassuring look, and addressed Kirk and Spock.

"Please forgive me. I have not meant to ignore you. Caldin had a colony problem he needed to share with me. Come up onto the platform. I wish to introduce you to the others."

Diogenes climbed up and took his place at the beautiful podium as a hush came over the assembled crowd. He leaned on the lectern, looking out over the audience. Then he closed his eyes.

"Let us meditate," he instructed, and his voice carried throughout the area. Kirk and Spock glanced at each other, checking with their eyes to see if he were using some type of amplification. None was apparent.

Every eye closed. After ten minutes, Kirk began to squirm and ventured a peek. Everyone else, including Spock, seemed lost in their own thoughts. He waited. Another five minutes passed. Suddenly Diogenes spoke again, still keeping his eyes closed.

"Oh, how fortunate we are to have come to this place, to have found a home where we can truly belong. Oh, how thankful we are, our hearts filled with gratitude, that we no longer need suffer the slings of prejudice and hate. For we are *all* equal, and no man or woman or child is

superior to another. This colony is the beginning of a new world for us and we are filled with love and appreciation." As he was speaking, the audience had begun to sway back and forth, and now they replied in unison.

"We are thankful for Goodhope, oh, yes, we are thankful."

Diogenes opened his eyes and looked out at the crowd, a broad smile on his face.

"Is Goodhope your home?" he asked.

The audience responded enthusiastically. "Yes!"

"Are you *loved* in Goodhope?"

"Yes!"

"Do you *belong* in Goodhope?"

"Yes!"

"No one is different here," he encouraged.

"No one... " came the response.

"And *all* are different."

"We belong, we belong." The crowd was familiar with the litany and obviously loving it.

Diogenes raised his arms and the people quieted, waiting, listening.

"What a wonderful thing it is to know that we belong, that we are loved, enfolded and protected. My Beloveds, look at yourselves. See how insignificant the flesh is. Turn to your inner mind to find the truth. The body is merely a vessel, outward appearance is of so little consequence. Cast out the treacherous pride in things physical, which makes it impossible to reach that which lies hidden deep within all beings. You are your brother and your brother is you - no more, no less. For if a man or woman shall think, 'I am smarter, better looking, kinder, more dedicated than my brother,' that person is showing prejudice. If a man or woman says, 'My way is better than yours', that person is acting with pride and pride is a deadly obstacle. Your own will must yield to that which is good for all. Then, and only then, will you be prepared for the absolute joy of real belonging." Diogenes paused in his speech, his attention drawn to an old man sitting on the ground near the front of the crowd. The man had not opened his eyes since the meditation and now it became apparent that he was asleep. Kirk saw Diogenes throw a significant look at Caldin, although he could not interpret the meaning. Then the leader leaned over the podium, his eyes blazing, and shouted the old man's name.

"Jory! Jory Law!"

A woman sitting next to the man nudged him and he quickly opened his eyes, startled. Diogenes called the name again and his tone was harsh, accusing.

"Jory Law, you will approach the platform."

Law's face showed fear and the woman next to him, most likely his wife, was on the verge of tears. Painfully, the old man gained his feet and slowly made his way to the edge of the platform. Diogenes looked down at him, his expression hard.

"Old Man, were you sleeping during the message?" The words were a challenge. Obviously terrified, the man formed an answer.

"I... I just dozed for a moment, Diogenes. I... I didn't mean to. I wanted to receive the message..."

Kirk, seated on the platform close to where the old man stood below, found himself growing increasingly angry. Diogenes was berating the poor soul for falling asleep, and the man looked as though he were hardly able to stand. Spock threw a warning look at his Captain and the two

men held their tongues.

"Did you, indeed?" Diogenes was questioning. "And with good reason. You are not exempt from your need to hear the words of truth. Your spirit is not so strong as to exist without sustenance."

"I... know that. I am a true seeker.. " Law tried to justify.

"Ah, but your son is not!"

The old man looked up sharply at that, panic on his face. In the audience, his wife gasped. Diogenes looked again at Caldin, who nodded. Then he continued, his voice still harsh.

"Your son is a transgressor, Jory Law, a shirker of duty. He refuses to do his share, to be one with us, and you try to cover for him. You do his work as well as your own and you are so exhausted you cannot stay awake to hear the message. Where is your son now, Old Man? He is not here at the meeting."

"Anton is ill. He was unable to do his chores. He is unable to attend," Law pleaded. "I only did a little of his work to help him because he is ill."

"You lie!" Diogenes shouted. "You stand before me and lie to protect a wicked youth!" The crowd shifted uncomfortably and Law's wife sobbed quietly. Kirk began to inch forward, but Spock's hand on his arm cautioned against interference. Kirk glanced at Caldin, realizing now it was what he must have been discussing with Diogenes on the way to the meeting. Caldin had discovered Anton Law's misconduct and had been reporting it. Diogenes had been prepared for this confrontation.

The leader was shaking his head, addressing the crowd as well as Law. "Oh, what evil motives cause a follower to deceive. Do you think you can decide for yourself what is best for all? Do you think your will so strong that it must not yield? You are filled with deadly pride in your own judgment. This man's son makes a mockery of our beliefs and instead of seeking help, Jory Law elects to assist him in his defilement. Jory Law sleeps through the words that will show him the danger of his ways. He jeopardizes his place of belonging and acceptance in Goodhope. He totters on the brink of self-destruction." Diogenes stared at the man again. "For this act of deceit, for this failure to comply with our rules, you are as much a transgressor as your son and for your own good, you must be punished. Punishment is necessary to purge you of these evil tendencies."

Law hung his head, prepared to accept his fate. Diogenes motioned to two men at the other end of the platform.

"Bereth, Hand, take him to the shed. A week's meditation may show him the destructiveness of his ways."

As the two men escorted Law from the gathering, his wife sobbed uncontrollably. Diogenes looked at her.

"Woman, do not weep for your husband. Be joyful that his intent was discovered so that he might be saved from self-destruction." The person next to her put an arm around Law's wife and she calmed, wiping her eyes.

Diogenes took a breath and seemed to draw himself up to greater stature. The crowd relaxed. When he spoke, the harshness was gone and his voice was quiet, compassionate, yet strong.

"It is a grievous thing that this should have happened today. It is grievous that one of our beloveds has come close to straying, and it hurts me that he must be dealt with. I know you all understand, and that you will meditate on how you will be able to help him and each other in the future. But today we are joined by two seekers who have come to Goodhope in search of a home. I am afraid they may have been upset by what took place." Diogenes looked over at Kirk and Spock, gauging their reaction. "It is my sincere hope that in time they will come to understand and accept the truth of this incident." Diogenes held out his arms, beckoning the two to join him at the podium.

Slowly they came to their feet. Kirk was not convinced by the gentleness in the leader's voice, but decided that for now it was best to do as he was asked. As they approached the podium, Diogenes put an arm around each of them and spoke low, so that no one else could hear.

"Don't be afraid by what you saw. The old man will be all right."

"He seemed very scared," Kirk whispered. Diogenes frowned.

"Because he knew he had done wrong. His son has a bad streak and cares nothing for the trouble he causes his father. Jory expected to be punished. He would not have been able to live with his guilt if he had not."

Diogenes turned, facing the crowd. "This is Jim Kirk and Spock. Make them welcome at Goodhope. They seek to belong." A cheer swelled up from the crowd. Despite the altercation, Kirk and Spock could not help but be touched by the sincerity and the enthusiasm of these people. The warmth and love which emanated from the group was genuine. The crowd broke spontaneously into a song, the words of which were simple yet stirring.

*Never had a home
Like this place before
Never in my life
Since the day I was born.
I was hated and rejected -
Oh, I know they were wrong
'Cause now I am accepted,
This is where I belong.
Yes, I am loved and I'm respected,
This is where I am strong.*

*Never had a home
Never in my life
This place is my home, for the rest of my life.
Yes, the rest of my life...*

Standing between them, Diogenes did not join in the singing, but closed his eyes, letting the mood of his people wash over him. When the song was over, the leader spoke again.

"Goodhope shelters all who seek a home away from the bigotry and misunderstanding of society. From this humble beginning we will make the galaxy see that our way is right, our way is truth, our way offers peace without fear." Quietly, he dismissed the colonists, then seemed to slump. Caldin appeared at his side.

"Diogenes must rest now," he told Kirk and Spock. "You may go eat with the others, then Valla will take you to your cabin." He indicated a young woman waiting at the edge of the platform. Then Caldin put his arm around the leader and guided him out of the Rotunda.

* * * *

After a simple meal served community-style in the open, Kirk and Spock were escorted to one of the cabins by the woman introduced as Valla. She explained that meals were prepared twice a day, and that individuals were given a choice of consuming their food at the long, public tables or, if they preferred, returning to their cabins with their rations. Most of the colonists, she admitted, elected the communal setting for the camaraderie. Valla also briefed them on the daily schedule which included worktime, a rest period, and an enrichment program.

The cabin they were provided was sparsely furnished. There was a small round table in the center with two wooden chairs, a few built-in shelves, packing crates formed into a chest, and one low sofa. The lavatory was in a tiny alcove off to one side of the main section. There was a loft, accessible by ladder, where sleeping space was provided.

"We live simply, Jim," Valla commented, apparently responding to the curiosity in his gaze. "But you will discover here a peace you would not find in the finest palaces in the galaxy."

"Spock and I didn't come for luxuries," Kirk assured her.

Just then, Caldin and another man arrived with their belongings from the spacecraft. Kirk was surprised, having expected to return to the ship himself. He glanced over at Spock. The Vulcan raised an eyebrow then moved to assist the men.

Caldin was beaming. "Here you are, friends. This is everything you'll need. I see you like good books, too." He fished into one of the cases and came up with a slim volume.

It was disconcerting how familiar everyone seemed to be. The woman began to unpack one of the boxes and to stash clothing in the chest.

"It's always a delight when new people arrive," the second man said, warmly touching Kirk's arm. "We hope you find peace here in Goodhope."

"Please..." Spock addressed Valla, "do not bother with that. We can do it." Gently he took the things from her hands and placed them aside.

Caldin spoke to them both. "I took the liberty of removing your identiplates for safe-keeping. If you have anything else of value, you might want to consider..."

Kirk frowned. "You took our identiplates?"

Caldin flushed. "I'm sorry. If it offends you, I'll have them returned immediately. I just thought..."

"No," Kirk interrupted thoughtfully, deliberately. "We'd have no need of them here, I suppose." Carefully he reached into a pocket of a jacket at the bottom of a pile and fished out an impressive stack of credits. The money had been provided by Starfleet Command for just this purpose. "Here," he said now to Caldin, "we won't be needing this here in Goodhope, either. Will you take it to the vault?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you." Kirk did an exaggerated yawn, and the ever-considerate Caldin picked up on it at once.

"This has been an extremely busy day for both of you. Come," he gestured to the others. "Let them meditate in private on the momentous step they have taken."

At the doorway, Valla turned back. "Later, if you feel up to it, many of us congregate in the clearing - where we ate. We sing and share the benefits of our good fortune. You are welcome to join us."

Caldin nodded agreement. "Yes. You must begin to become a part of the whole, to experience the fullness of life at Goodhope." Without waiting for an answer, they left.

Immediately, Kirk sagged into the sofa and exhaled deeply. Spock began to empty the crates of the few belongings they had brought along. Each of them was bursting with impressions, observations and comments, yet for a moment neither spoke. Kirk gazed around the cabin, and his first words were fabricated from that study.

"No windows."

Spock hesitated, intent on his task. Then, "Jim... our identiplates are not all that are missing."

"Oh?" Kirk stood up and joined him at the table. "What?"

A puzzled frown wrinkled Spock's forehead. "All of our documents - the Liberty registration, discharge certificates --"

"Diogenes said..." Kirk began.

"Yes, but wait. The chess set we packed, the Vulcan statuette, your Greek mini-sculpture ... and the portarecorder and music tapes."

It was Kirk's turn to be puzzled. "Why? Most of those have no monetary value. They're just... personal effects." He and Spock had deliberately selected those particular items to give a sense of permanency, a proclamation of uprooting, to the cover story. Even the chess set was fashioned by ship's stores, their own time-worn set still in place aboard the Enterprise.

"Of course..." Realization dawned on Spock. "They are all indicative of our former lives, separate cultures. The teaching of Diogenes obliterates all that was and focuses on a newfound identity. Relics from a former existence would be too much of a temptation."

Kirk looked askance. "You may be right, but I still would have preferred to be consulted on the subject. I don't like the idea of anyone authoritatively appropriating my possessions."

"Nor I, but considering how open they have been about it, there is not much we can do. If we were 'true seekers', this would not disturb us."

Kirk pondered that for a moment, then double-checked the door before removing his shirt.

"We'd better send a preliminary message to the ship while we have the chance."

KIRK TO ENTERPRISE, REPORT NUMBER ONE: Commander Spock and I have been accepted at Goodhope Colony. There are no outward signs of brutality or inhumane treatment. The people are warm and friendly, the environment is harsh but the colony is carefully tended. We met briefly with Diogenes, who seems courteous and kind. It's too soon to really judge, and one or two things seem slightly discordant, but we'll know more by tomorrow night. Next transmission will be more detailed. Kirk out.

After they had washed and rested, they left the cabin to seek out the gathering Valla had mentioned. Darkness had fallen and the clearing was blazing with light from lanterns strung on highwires. There was a party atmosphere to the scene, which reminded Kirk of evenings spent as a child at summer camp. Colonists milled around, talking in animated tones, or sat at the long tables. Some were working at what appeared to be craft projects, either individually or in groups. Others were writing or drawing in notebooks. A few played music on hand-fashioned instruments and Kirk recognized the melody he had heard the crowd sing earlier.

"What are we expected to do?" Spock asked dubiously as they wandered around.

"Whatever we want, I suppose."

Suddenly a nearby voice called their names. Seated alone at one of the tables was the man who had brought their things to the cabin.

"I didn't have a chance to introduce myself earlier," he greeted them as they approached. "I live in the cabin next to yours. My name is Nars."

Kirk sat across from him. "Hello again." He noted the writing paper and stylus in Nars' hands. "What are you doing?"

"Composing a letter to be sent out to my cousin. Mail goes out tomorrow."

"How do you... send it from here?" Kirk asked, surprised by the man's words. One of the most confirmed charges against Goodhope was the lack of communication from the colonists. Many relatives and friends had not heard from their loved ones in months or even years.

Nars shrugged his shoulders. "We transmit to Starbase Twelve, I think. I'm not too sure of the relays they use."

"Do you ever receive replies?" Spock asked.

"Certainly. Not too often," Nars admitted, "what with subspace radio being what it is."

Kirk could understand that. The colony was isolated from the main hub of the Federation, and it could take months for a message to make the circuit. He nodded. "Terrible."

"I just wanted to let you know that I'm nearby, if you ever need anything. My sister, Valla, my brother Parc, and I are there for you, all right?"

"Thank you. Spock and I appreciate that, Nars." Kirk stood.

"May we extend the same courtesy to you, sir," Spock responded.

Nars seemed pleased by the Vulcan's words, and he waved them off cheerfully.

As Kirk and Spock walked away from the tables, Kirk noticed that one of the groups who stood talking included Jory Law's wife. He nudged Spock as the woman broke away and began to walk in their general direction.

"C'mon," Kirk urged.

They intercepted her and Kirk smiled warmly. "Evening, ma'am,"

She smiled brightly in return. "You're the two newcomers, aren't you? Welcome to Goodhope."

"Thank you. We were... concerned about your husband, Mrs. Law. Is he all right?"

"He *will* be," she asserted firmly.

"You seemed upset this afternoon..." Kirk prompted.

"I was taken by surprise and I acted foolishly. Diogenes has given my back the peace in my heart."

"What will happen to your husband?" Spock asked.

"He will discover the truth. Lessons can be most painful for those of us more advanced in our lives. We've gone too many years in a set pattern of thought. Change is difficult."

"Why did you come to Goodhope?" Kirk asked.

"Because I heard the words of Diogenes and it was as if a part of me that had been waiting was suddenly filled. Jory heard, too, and he agreed."

"And your son, the one Diogenes called a 'transgressor'. Did he agree?" Kirk asked.

"Anton is young, immature, and in our ignorance I think we spoiled him. Goodhope is the best thing that could have happened to him. Only, as with many youths, he doesn't realize it yet."

"Tell me," Spock probed, "would you want to leave Goodhope if you could?"

"Leave? Why would anyone want to leave here?" Her voice was blank.

"Has no one ever tried?" Spock pressed.

"Tried...? You make it sound like a prison," she charged. "There's no co-ercion used. We stay because we love it, because we love Diogenes."

"I hope we can attain such peace." Kirk was instantly enthusiastic and wistful.

"You will." She smiled again. "Now, if you'll excuse me, please. I'm quite tired..."

"Of course." Kirk stepped aside. "Good evening, Mrs. Law."

As she passed out of hearing, Kirk turned puzzled eyes to Spock. "It all sounds reasonable, and yet..."

"... And yet there's a man out there, locked in a shed for seven days..." Spock picked up.

"Yes, the shed," Kirk remarked. "I think we should go take a look at that shed."

Spock's eyebrow quirked. "Affirmative... Jim," he finished awkwardly.

* * * *

The punishment shed was near the edge of the compound, set back against a craggy hill. The two men approached with a touch of stealth, and when they discovered a guard posted out in front of the shed, they took pains to conceal their presence completely.

The guard was one of the two who had taken Jory Law from the meeting. He was not armed in any visible way and he sat on a stool in front of the door, casually weaving a few blades of straw. Once or twice he glanced up, looking, listening, as if he heard them, but he did not leave the stool.

There was no lantern out here, only the moonlight by which to see, and the shed was dark and silent. Like the cabins, there were no windows. In fact, the shed appeared to be just a much smaller version of the living quarters.

Kirk and Spock tiptoed around from the back and got close to the building, but there was simply nothing to see or hear. Defeated, they finally gave up and sneaked away, to return to their own cabin and several hours of bedtime discussion on all they had seen and heard on their first day at Goodhope.

Chapter Two

On their third day in Goodhope, Kirk and Spock were approached by Valla as they trudged back to their cabin at the end of their daily chores in the fields. She and her brothers - Kirk could only assume they were biologically related, since everyone in Goodhope were 'kin' in the philosophical sense - lived in the cabin nearest theirs. Valla intercepted them on the pathway between the two cabins.

"Jim - Spock, how are you doing?" She greeted them cheerfully.

Kirk smiled warmly, liking the friendly, gentle woman. "Fine, thanks."

"Your skin's darkening from the sun," she remarked. "But your hair..." She reached up to touch it. "Goodness, it gets lighter."

He laughed easily, wondering where she had been raised that she had never seen such a phenomena. "It's not that uncommon among Terrans."

Her eyes drifted to Spock and she spoke quickly, but not before Kirk had caught a glimpse of disapproval cross her face.

"Spock, you do not darken with the sun's exposure."

"My skin is less sensitive. The sun is much stronger on Vulcan and we are biologically equipped to withstand..."

"When he does 'tan', it's more like olive green," Kirk teased fondly.

"It is good to acknowledge our differences," Valla replied thoughtfully, "but it is wrong to take pride in those differences."

"A difference that makes no difference *is* no difference?" Kirk quoted.

Valla nodded. "Precisely. Anyway, I didn't come out here for idle chatter. I wanted to invite you to our circle group tonight."

"What is a 'circle group'?" Spock asked.

"Every colonist belongs to a circle. We change groups for stimulation when complacency sets in. There are... oh, I don't know, maybe seventy-five circles. Each circle contains a minimum of eight members, a maximum of twelve. Meetings are once a week and we exchange views, strengthen the messages given to us by Diogenes, strive for greater wisdom and understanding." She broke off and regarded them candidly. "You would truly benefit from it."

"Sounds interesting," Kirk agreed. "When, and where?"

"Sunset, in front of my cabin tonight. We rotate locations. Perhaps we'll be honored by a visit from Diogenes tonight. He often drops in unannounced on circle groups."

"We shall be there," Spock promised.

"Thank you for inviting us," Kirk finished.

* * * *

The area in front of Valla's cabin had been transformed. The ground had been freshly cleared of rocks, and large blankets laid over the dirt to cover a space about twelve feet square. Lanterns were hung on poles shoved into the dirt, ringed the section. As Kirk and Spock approached, they noticed that seven men and women were already there.

Valla stood up to greet them. Taking each of them by an arm, she led them to the group.

"You all know our newest members of the colony - Jim, Spock. But it's much more difficult for them to know all of us."

Several people laughed; they all smiled. Valla addressed Kirk and Spock. "Who *do* you know?"

"You," Kirk confessed. Then he added, pointing, "Your brother, Nars." He shrugged. "I give up."

"All right. The other three gentlemen are Herkon, Peter, and KimSoon. The ladies are Jessica and Mialyn. And we are still awaiting our final member, Leander."

"Here he comes now," Peter observed.

After the greetings were completed, the group fashioned a circle on the ground and everyone laid back, facing the sky, hands joined. Kirk noted that Spock was on his right and Nars on his left. After a moment of silence, one of the other men began to speak.

"Look up. Look up from whence the circle has come. The circle has no beginning, it has no end. It is forever and unbroken. The stars formed our beginning and they shall be our destiny. From nothingness we came to be, as the stars came to be from nothingness. Each of us is an incredible link to the cosmos. We are one with the universe. We are the universe. The ripple becomes the wave, the wave the tide. So be it."

"So be it," they all chanted.

Kirk felt his nerves tingling responsively. He felt the warmer-than-Human hand in his and tightened the pressure, squeezing slightly.

The man continued. From the faintly Oriental accent, Kirk decided it might be KimSoon, but he could not be sure.

"We do not exist alone. We belong to each other, cemented by our glorious destiny, our common, universal heritage. No one is different, alien, foreign, strange."

"No one," they chorused, and Kirk joined in. He heard Spock, beside him, say the words.

"We strive to erase pride, to erase prejudice, to be equal and equally loved. With that goal in mind, let the circle be our guide," he finished.

Gradually the members began to sit up. Kirk looked toward KimSoon.

"Your words were beautiful," he said, meaning it sincerely.

KimSoon grinned broadly. "Not mine, friend. Those are the words of Diogenes. I was only quoting."

"We are grateful, then, to Diogenes," Spock remarked.

"Diogenes taught us the procedure for the Circle group. Those of us here at the beginning of Goodhope were blessed to have him at every gathering. Now," KimSoon shrugged, "there are just too many. About ten groups meet every night."

"Have you been here since Goodhope was founded?" Kirk asked him.

"I came on the second ship, from Machos 10," Kim explained. "Those were exciting days."

"Every day is exciting, Kim," Peter reproved.

"True, true," KimSoon smiled and nodded. "But Diogenes was... *everywhere*, then."

A voice spoke from behind them. "He is *still* everywhere, KimSoon."

The group turned as one to face their leader. Diogenes strolled into the circle and sat down easily, his expression serene and composed. The lamplight gleamed off his yellow hair, creating an aura around his head. As usual, he was dressed in white, accented this evening with silver thread at his throat and shoulders.

"Teacher... " someone said faintly.

"Shall we embark upon our journey together," Diogenes invited. "There is so much we need to learn about each other and ourselves. The truths, the rotting, hurting things we keep hidden, must be exorcised, must be faced and discarded before we can attain pure peace. Who will begin?"

No one spoke for a moment, then Jessica ventured, "I will."

Diogenes turned his full attention on her. "Courage is a beautiful thing, Jessica Avery. Tell me first, have you ever hated?"

She seemed mesmerized by his eyes. "Yes."

"Whom did you hate?"

"Many people."

"Races?"

"No. No... just people. A boy in my neighborhood. A woman who was a friend of the family."

"Why did you hate them?"

"They... annoyed me."

"Not good enough," KimSoon contributed.

"Were they 'ugly', Jessica?" Valla asked.

Kirk was fascinated, watching the scene played out. Subconsciously, he began to form his own answers. Joey Patterson, a friend of Sam's had always set his teeth on edge. Big, loud,

overbearing, deceitful, forever tormenting a kid brother. And there had been Finnigan, another obnoxious lout. Would he call what he felt for them hatred?

Jessica finally came to her own defense. "No, they weren't different. They were just people, like us. Only, they wouldn't listen to reason. They'd never dream of seeking a place like Goodhope."

Diogenes asked her, "Do you think you are special, because you've chosen to come here, Jessica?"

"I listened, and I believed. If it is good for us, is it not good for all?" she demanded.

"We cannot force our beliefs on others," Nars countered.

"Do you condemn all those who do not think as we do?" Diogenes asked.

"I condemn no one! I have no right to condemn."

Diogenes turned to the rest of the group. "Who else here has hated?"

Everyone answered quietly, "I have." Even Kirk found himself mouthing the words. It was true, it was an emotion over which he had no control... suddenly, he realized that Diogenes was staring at Spock. He turned to look at his friend.

"Spock?" Diogenes voice was soft. "Have you never hated?"

"Hate is an emotion, sir. On Vulcan, we are trained not to express such feelings."

"I know of your planet's philosophy, Spock," Diogenes countered. "And I have heard that your training is quite severe. But you were not *born* without emotions. As a baby, as a child, you felt warmth, security, love. You felt cold, anger, even hatred, did you not?"

"Perhaps..." Spock seemed slightly uncomfortable. "It is difficult to remember such things."

Herkon put in, "Maybe you don't want to remember."

"If you deny emotion," Diogenes went on, "then why are you seeking the peace of Goodhope? To have peace, one must first be troubled."

"To say that there are places where I am not satisfied, as an individual, is not to treat the situation emotionally," Spock explained.

Even to Kirk it sounded like typical Vulcan doubletalk. Diogenes seized upon it.

"And what of those who dissatisfy you? What do you feel toward them?"

"I try to be tolerant. They -- " Spock began.

"You *try*?" Diogenes emphasized. "Is it difficult to be tolerant?"

Kirk wanted to tell him to leave Spock alone - the confrontation was becoming too dangerous. Spock's self-esteem as a Vulcan was tenuous enough, he didn't need this probing.

"Yes," Spock admitted. "Sometimes it is difficult."

"You seem awfully proud of the fact that you're a Vulcan," Valla commented. "What has being a Vulcan done for you, as an individual?"

Kirk had though earlier that he liked the woman, now he took it back. *Unfair*, he screamed silently. Still, he found himself listening closely as Spock formed a reply.

"It taught me to respect all races, to delight in the differences... a philosophy much like yours, which is why Goodhope fascinates me."

"Spock... " Diogenes softened his voice. "Listen carefully and do not misunderstand, for I do not mean to imply that you are not welcome at Goodhope. Indeed, you know you are. But... if Vulcan can offer such peace and contentment, why did you come here? Why don't you merely return to your homeworld? Why did you leave to begin with?"

"I... " Spock faltered. Of course, Kirk knew, Spock had *not* chosen Goodhope, yet somehow that did not seem the issue. Spock studied Diogenes. "I told you the other day. Their philosophy is not always extended to someone not purely Vulcan."

"You were looked down upon?" Valla seemed shocked.

"Not... precisely. Nothing overt," Spock hedged, trying, Kirk suspected, to keep the cover story and yet defend Vulcan.

"Are you proud to be a Vulcan?" Diogenes asked.

"Pride is also an emotion."

"You exist without *any* emotion?" Leander asked, skeptical.

"I have always attempted to do so."

Diogenes looked over at Kirk, thoughtful, then back to Spock. "Yet you permit a Human friend, you seek sanctuary at Goodhope with him. Is emotion not necessary to sustain a friendship? Spock, Spock... you are not being honest with yourself. Can't you see the dangerous game you are playing? You invite deceit and dishonesty to take you over by trying to be two different people. "

My God, Kirk marveled. The man's known Spock for three days, talked with him twice -- and he can be that perceptive. A chill inched down his spine.

"I... " Spock fidgeted. Diogenes moved close to him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"*We love you*, Spock, and in time *you* will come to love *us*. You will be free to admit that love, to experience the positive emotions without fearing the negative. You will learn that emotions, like anything else in life, may be good and may be bad. Listen to your inner self, let it guide you in the days to come."

No one spoke for a moment, then Diogenes stood. "Go forth now, and each of you search your heart for those negative emotions. Take them out, examine them, and throw them away. Peace, my Beloveds."

"Peace to all... " they called out.

One by one they began to rise and look around. Kirk noticed several people surround Jessica and hug her. Then a few approached Spock and himself. Valla stood before the Vulcan and gently embraced him. When she released him, Peter took her place. No words were spoken, it was a tactile celebration of unity. No one was excluded. Leander, Mialyn, and Nars embraced Kirk and he returned the gesture awkwardly. The silent activity went on for about ten minutes. Finally they began to drift away.

Kirk touched Spock's arm to indicate their own departure, and the Vulcan met his eyes. There was such confusion in the deep brown depths that, impulsively, Kirk followed the example of the others. He raised his arms and put them around the lean shoulders and held him for a moment. Then, keeping one hand on the Vulcan's shoulder, they walked slowly back to their cabin.

* * * *

In the privacy of their cabin, neither man spoke as they got ready for bed. When Spock returned from washing, he found Kirk already in the loft. He ascended the ladder, pausing at the top rung.

"Have you filed the report?" he asked.

Kirk, propped on an elbow, shook his head. "No. I'll do it in the morning before we leave. I'm exhausted."

Spock climbed back down to extinguish the light. In a minute, he returned and crawled into his sleeping area.

"Spock... " Kirk's voice cut into the darkness. "Are you all right?"

"Of course, Jim." Spock knew the answer was too swift, too emphatic, so he added wryly, "Although I was not aware that I had so many problems."

"They mean well."

"I know." They were silent for a moment.

"It's strange," Kirk began thoughtfully, "I've always believed 'paradise' doesn't work. Remember the people of Landru? Same idea - peace, tranquility, all are one. Yet I found it unhealthy. Here, the philosophy is the same, yet the people are vital, involved, alive. There's no apathy, which is usually present in such a society."

"It seems to work because Goodhope is not a paradise, Jim. There are problems, concerns, and they are dealt with, not ignored."

"Maybe that's it," Kirk agreed. "I'm not always sure that I *agree* with Diogenes, but I approve what he's trying to do here."

"What of the negative charges made against him?"

Kirk sighed. "We've seen nothing to substantiate such claims. Frankly, I'm starting to resent the role of Devil's Advocate."

"Our mission... " Spock began.

"Yes, I know. But, Spock, most of these people left the Federation because they were scorned, turned aside, rejected. What right now, does the Federation have to come snooping in their lives, under the guise of protection?"

"We have the opportunity to invalidate the claims, though. If our reports are favorable, that should be the end of it."

"Should be, but will it?" Kirk asked softly. Spock was silent, so Kirk looked over at him, trying to read his facial expression in the dark. The impassive features had never been so guarded. "What do *you* think?"

"I am attempting to remain an impartial observer."

"They make that difficult," Kirk murmured.

"Indeed. I did not say it was easy."

"Do you believe I'm over-reacting?"

"I believe we need more time, more knowledge," Spock answered.

"Agreed." Kirk yawned sleepily. "Well, morning comes early in Goodhope. We'll see what tomorrow brings."

Kirk shifted onto his other side and in minutes the soft, even sound of his breathing told the Vulcan he was sleeping. Spock stared up at the ceiling, contemplating the evening, and the words of Diogenes.

There was, indeed, a pride in being Vulcan. They were taught, as children, in logical, non-emotional words to feel that emotion. T'Pol herself had stated that 'Vulcans pride themselves on their heritage.' Was it necessarily wrong, as Diogenes insinuated, to feel a sense of racial superiority? Obviously that line of logic was more in tune with Vulcan philosophy than that which Vulcan itself taught. Paradox.

After the meeting, when those people had come up to him, when he had been faced with physical demonstrativeness, he had felt a momentary confusion. He was trained to disapprove, yet he had not found it offensive. The silent message had come through - regardless of what or who he was, he was loved and appreciated. Then Jim had come to him and understood, offered his own, unique comfort.

It was a moment that stood apart, and Spock knew he would never forget it, or the people who had made it happen.

Chapter Three

The following day, as Kirk and Spock headed out of the compound toward the fields, Caldin came running toward them.

"Jim... Spock, Diogenes asked to see you. Come on up to the house."

Briefly, Kirk wondered if they had been uncovered somehow, if Diogenes had learned or inferred the true reason for their presence in Goodhope. As they walked back to the big white house, he tried to consider what he would say, inventing lies to cover the lies, imagining every possible move. Questioning Caldin revealed nothing. When asked if anything were wrong, Caldin looked at him curiously and said only, "You'll have to ask Diogenes that. I was asked merely to bring you."

Diogenes was at his desk as he had been when they first arrived. But now, the room was occupied by many others. Colonists sat at the work benches, and a few were engaged in tasks at the file cabinets. It was a scene of concentrated activity.

"Good morning, Jim, Spock. Sit down," the leader requested. As the men took seats, he continued. "I've been reading through your files, the papers you were asked to fill out when you arrived..."

Here it comes, Kirk thought. *Where did we make a mistake?* Yet he noticed that Diogenes did not seem displeased or angry. The leader gazed at them intently.

"Here in Goodhope, gentlemen, we like to feel that everyone has a niche in which they are comfortable, satisfied. No offense, but the two of you are not farmhands."

Kirk was momentarily confused. "We never said we were," he pointed out.

"Of course not," Diogenes assured. "And now that I've had a chance to examine your records, I'd like to offer you work positions that are more in line with your capabilities."

"Oh." Some of the tension drained out of Kirk and he smiled at the leader. "What did you have in mind?" Anything, he thought, would be preferable to the manual field labor. Although that work, too, had its own rewards, he'd prefer something else.

Diogenes turned first to Spock. "You are a scientist, with your specialty in computers. Unfortunately, ours is not a very computerized society - at least not yet. We do have some antique models which will probably have you tearing your hair out - or so the technicians tell me. We rely on them to double-check our scientific studies. Most of our work is agricultural in nature, of course. We've been conducting tests with soil and irrigation possibilities, ways to improve the crop yield, that sort of thing. We're also planning to build a power plant so that the entire compound can go on electricity. We have two portable generators now, and they're certainly not sufficient."

"I would endeavor to contribute whatever I could," Spock responded, already eager to start. "I have made some observations in the field which may prove beneficial."

"Excellent. You may start today. The lab is located behind this house, on a path to your left." Diogenes turned to Kirk.

"And you, Jim, have several advantageous points, also. You are familiar with Federation bureaucracy, Starfleet regulations and forms. We are required to file a number of reports, consisting of statistical data regarding the operational end of the colony. That means a lot of bookkeeping, and a system that's beyond reproach. We have several staff-members who do an excellent job. What I'd like you to do is to co-ordinate their activities, compile the daily reports into monthly statements and take care of issuing the tri-monthly Federation paperwork. As it is, the staff works independently, and I've found there's a lot of crossover, so you'll be free to organize the department as you see fit. It's an extremely important phase of our office work, Jim, so I'll be working closely with you at first until we get it smoothed out."

"Sounds like an interesting challenge," Kirk affirmed.

"Good. As time passes, there may be other duties I'll want you to assume. We shall begin today." Diogenes waited until Spock had begun to rise, then he frowned. "Spock... one moment, please. There's one other thing I wished to speak to both of you about." He folded his hands on the desk in front of him and his expression was disapproving.

Kirk felt suddenly uneasy. *What now?*

Diogenes continued to regard them sternly, letting the silence stretch out the tension before he spoke. Finally, he began. "I was told that you were seen wandering around the shed where Jory Law is being isolated the other day. The guard described your actions as 'furtive'."

Kirk opened his mouth to offer an alibi, but Diogenes didn't give him a chance to speak. "Now, I can understand your concern, I accept that our ways are still strange to you, but I cannot condone such open distrust and disrespect. Didn't I assure you that the old man would be all right, that our punishment is meted out with fairness and compassion?"

"Yes, but -- " Kirk managed.

"But you chose not to believe me." Diogenes was silent. Then, "If you had come to me, expressed your concern, I could have allayed your fears. Did you speak to the guard, ask him questions?"

"No," Spock admitted.

"He would have assured you that Law was all right. You gained nothing by a private assessment of the building." Diogenes' eyes narrowed. "You were dishonest in your actions, and I will not tolerate dishonesty. Because you are new here, I'll overlook it this time, but if you cannot learn to trust what I say, then you are not welcome in Goodhope."

Kirk glanced at the Vulcan and their eyes met, forming a silent question at the veiled threat.

Quietly, Kirk formed a response. "Concern for others sometimes prompts hasty reactions. We couldn't dismiss the picture of the old man's fear, his wife's obvious despair..."

"Certainly. A week with one's own evil thoughts as the only companion can be a fearsome thing. But in a few days, Jory will return to us and you'll be able to judge for yourselves the benefits to be derived from such a personal confrontation.

"I dislike dealing with unpleasant situations such as this," he went on. "It grieves me to encounter distrust and hostility. But I will not allow it. Is that clear, gentlemen?"

"Perfectly." Kirk suddenly felt foolish. As one accustomed to command, he could empathize with Diogenes' need for authority and obedience. Yet, at the same time, the incident served to remind him that they were being watched, and their actions reported back to the leader, and *that* was disquieting.

"Affirmative," Spock agreed, uncomfortable under the penetrating eyes of Diogenes. There was a curious sense that no matter what they did, the leader seemed to be one step ahead of them. And yet it was not a malevolent superiority, but rather a gentle commander who tried to guide them forward.

"All right, then. We will speak of it no more. Spock, you may go to the lab now. Jim, come with me and I'll introduce you to your co-workers."

* * * *

For the next several days, Kirk and Spock were kept extremely busy. The new jobs were absorbing and taxing in a way which the farming had not been. They began to slip into the full schedule of the community, rising at five a.m. and sometimes not stumbling back to bed until nearly midnight.

Every day started with a community breakfast in the clearing. The food was tasty but meagre, and hunger seemed to return too soon after eating. After the meal, Diogenes spoke briefly before everyone was dismissed to their respective labors. It was a long shift, until four p.m., at which time they gathered in the Rotunda for the daily address from Diogenes. Then, they ate again, the second and final meal of the day. From that time on they were theoretically on their own, but there were numerous activities, meeting sessions, group endeavors, always taking place. Diogenes, or the colonists who served as his aides, managed to oversee everything that occurred, skillfully creating an atmosphere of worthwhile recreation. The colonists were encouraged to participate and praised for diligence. To keep up the pose of 'true seekers', Kirk and Spock managed to go along with everything.

While the new jobs were stimulating, the most satisfying part of the day remained the two lectures by Diogenes himself. The man was a skillful orator, his speeches were thought-provoking and fascinating. Kirk could understand why so many people adored him - besides being a born leader and a charismatic person, he was appealing to one of mankind's oldest desires, the need to belong.

His fourth day on Diogenes' staff, Kirk was sent out to collect a report from Nieron, the man in charge of the colony's building program. Several new structures were under construction and Kirk finally located him at the site of the new schoolhouse.

As the two stood discussing the necessary data, a workman on the roof above their heads called out a sudden, sharp warning.

Nieron wasted several crucial seconds frozen by fear, but Kirk reacted instinctively, sensing the direction of the danger and the foreman's immobility. A pulley conveying a stack of lumber to the rooftop had broken its securing wire and the load was falling toward them. Kirk flattened and rolled to the right, pulling Nieron down with him. Dust choked his lungs as the heavy boards crashed around them, but it seemed they had made it past the point of impact. One plank on the rebound, however, struck Kirk on the shoulder and he howled with the incredible jolt of pain.

Nieron got shakily to his knees. "Jim... Jim, are you all right?" Other workers on the ground began to gather around them.

"Yes... it's all right," Kirk managed, struggling to sit up. The pain had subsided to a dull throb and Kirk decided he was more shaken than hurt. Excited, nervous chatter swelled around him and he calmed, automatically trying to cover the pain. With a curious detachment, he realized that his left arm felt numb, and when Nieron reached over and touched the injured shoulder, he winced and let out an involuntary moan.

"You'd better go to the infirmary and have that looked to," the foreman advised. His eyes met Kirk's. "Your swift action saved my life, Jim. I..." He trailed off, still badly shaken.

"I'll go with him, Nieron," Kirk heard a nearby voice. He looked up and recognized Leander, one of the men from the circle group. Kirk had not noticed him at the site until now.

The foreman nodded and Leander helped Kirk to his feet.

It was a fairly long walk to the infirmary, and by the time they arrived the pain had increased to a pounding in Kirk's shoulder. Leander kept up a steady, comforting stream of reassurance and idle chatter, keeping a solicitous eye on Kirk's progress.

The infirmary was a long, low building not far from the Rotunda. The inside was cool and dim and smelled, like hospitals everywhere, with a stinging odor that insulted the nostrils.

Leander explained the problem to a woman seated just inside the doorway, while Kirk took the opportunity to look around. Colonists, obviously sick or injured, sat on benches along the walls. There was a partition beyond and he could hear sounds of activity, but could not see past it. Leander turned back to him and told Kirk to take a seat.

Kirk found a spot on one of the benches as Leander bid him farewell. He waited. Every so often a woman appeared from behind the partition and called a name, and one of the waiting colonists would leave.

Chafing at the delay, he tried to ignore the persistent pain in his shoulder. Every time he shifted position it throbbed. It was nearly two hours before the woman called his name.

Relieved, he followed her past the partition and was led to a cubicle where he was instructed to remove his shirt and have a seat. Several minutes later, a frail old wisp of a man entered and Kirk looked up, wondering, until he noticed the caduceus attached to the man's shirt.

"Jim Kirk? I'm Gordon Towers. You had an accident...?" There was an air of skepticism in his look as he studied Kirk.

"Are you a doctor?" Kirk asked, equally skeptical.

Towers hesitated. "You're new to Goodhope, aren't you?"

"Yes," Kirk admitted.

"I am *the* doctor, Jim Kirk. And that's why it's very important that everyone understands the evil of malingering. I don't have time to hold hands or wipe noses. Let me see what you've managed to do to yourself."

"One doctor for almost a thousand people?" Kirk was amazed, ignoring the lecture.

Towers nodded and began to press on Kirk's shoulder as he spoke. "Oh, I'm not alone. My wife knows as much about medicine as I do, but she's not registered. And there are six nurses, all competent and efficient..." he paused as Kirk reacted to his probing. "Hurts, doesn't it? Well, I don't think any bones are broken. It's just bruised. Wait, I'll get some ointment."

"You don't *think*...?" Kirk asked. "Aren't you going to do a scan?"

"Scans cost money to operate. If there were some question, I'd use it, but in your case there's not." Towers reached into a cabinet and took out a tube. The ointment felt good, soothing, but Kirk still bristled at the treatment. Towers continued. "I'll wrap it for you and immobilize the arm. Take it easy for a few days, keep it elevated at night until the swelling goes down. It'll be sore for awhile, but most pain is only as bad as one believes it to be. Meditate, keep your thoughts pure and positive. You'll be all right." Reluctantly, it seemed, he handed the tube to Kirk. "Here. If it gets too bad, use this."

Kirk looked askance at the ointment. "And that's it? Look, a sonic treatment would --"

Towers laughed without mirth. "And an ounce of dilithium would make me a rich man. Jim, we have very little here. I have next to nothing with which to work. What do you expect?" He fastened the sling and gently guided Kirk's hand through it. "It's nearly time for the message. Go, now."

A woman showed Kirk out through the back door.

This time, he reflected, it was only a minor injury... but what happens when they get a major emergency? Kirk resolved to discuss the situation with Diogenes at work tomorrow.

People were hurrying toward the Rotunda from all directions, so Kirk, too, set off, peripherally searching for Spock's familiar figure. They always sat together at the daily sessions.

He found him seated near the platform. The Vulcan raised an arm in greeting and Kirk saw the shadow of consternation cross his face as he approached. As Kirk slipped in beside him, Spock could not suppress his concern.

"Jim... what happened?"

"Nothing serious," Kirk dismissed. "I had an accident - hurt my shoulder. But I discovered that the medical facilities leave much to be desired. Wait... I'll tell you about it after the message."

Spock regarded him thoughtfully, dissatisfied by the abrupt explanation, but he didn't press. Instead, he called Kirk's attention to something else. "Look," he remarked, indicating toward the front row. "Jory Law is back with us."

Pain forgotten, Kirk followed Spock's gaze. It was, indeed, the same old man who had been chastized on the day of their arrival. Kirk strained to get a better view of him. Law appeared to be thinner and his face was haggard, drawn, from the week-long imposed isolation. Kirk was too far away to tell if there were any signs of physical abuse.

Just then Diogenes entered and there was no time left for talk or speculation. Everyone turned toward the podium.

He began the meeting in the usual manner, fifteen minutes of silent meditation followed by the opening questions and responses. Kirk and Spock knew them by heart and joined in the crowd. When the group was primed and ready, Diogenes began his message.

"Beloveds, as my duties today carried me throughout Goodhope, I was heartened by the progress I observed. We are building a growing, self-sustaining community that belongs to all of us, as we belong to it and each other." There were smiles from the colonists, a few whispered comments. The reaction was not lost on Diogenes.

"These words of praise please you," he began. "You are proud of your accomplishments." Diogenes paused for the words to sink in. The smiles faded. "Pride is a deceitful enemy! Pride is a killer of love! Pride is self-centered, boastful! Pride fosters prejudice!" The audience shifted in discomfort and Kirk threw Spock a quick glance.

"Oh, Beloveds," Diogenes' voice softened in appeal. "I see by your faces that you have not yet purged yourselves of this vicious tendency. You cannot attain the true humility that brings peace as long as you harbor the tiniest trace of pride in your heart. What we do here in Goodhope, what we accomplish must be for the good of all and for no other reason. If you can finish your work in less time than it takes another, you must not feel that you have done better, but be grateful that you will have time to do more. In service and sacrifice there is joy and contentment. Goodhope is our testing ground. It is here that we will learn if we are truly worthy to live without hatred and bigotry. For these evils have no place in Goodhope, and anyone who feels them, even in secret, has no place in Goodhope."

The crowd stirred in agreement.

"Now, I have an example for you," Diogenes smiled. "Look down front, Beloveds, and see who sits among us once more. Our own Jory Law has returned of his own will, to the fold. Come forth, Jory, that we might welcome you back."

As the old man slowly rose to his feet, Kirk and Spock leaned forward to see better. The man seemed to be having some difficulty standing, and his wife put out her hand to help him. Diogenes peered over the podium at a young boy sitting on the other side of Law.

"Anton, rise and assist your father to the platform," he commanded.

The boy stood. He was a tall, skinny youth. He took his father's arm and the two made their way to Diogenes. Anton kept his eyes on the ground, his hand firmly supporting the old man. Kirk leaned over to Spock.

"Law looks pretty feeble," he whispered. "I wonder what happened to him in that shed." Spock was prevented from answering by a sharp, disapproving look from the man next to him,

As the Laws stood before him, Diogenes came around from behind the podium and gazed down at them.

"Have you learned the transgression of your ways, Jory?" he asked.

"Yes, Diogenes," the old man whispered. Kirk saw Anton stiffen, but the boy remained silent.

"What have you to say to the others?" Diogenes prompted.

Law began to sob. "Oh, Diogenes, I have learned of the evil in my heart. I beg your forgiveness for all of the hateful things I have done against the others. I... I... am so grateful..."

Diogenes jumped down from the platform, tears streaming down his own face, and embraced Jory Law.

"Jory..." his voice was husky, but his words were clear. "We are so grateful you have come back to us, so grateful you have seen and been saved from your wicked intentions." As he pulled the man close, Anton dropped his hand and stood back.

Watching, Kirk could see that the boy was coiled, tense, and he continued to stare at the ground, keeping his eyes averted from Diogenes and his father.

Diogenes pulled the smaller man's head to his chest, leaning forward to rest his own cheek on top of the grey, unruly hair. "Oh, Jory, I suffer even as you suffered the torments of a week of self-confrontation. I feel your pain, I understand the torture of facing the evil within ourselves."

"Diogenes... Diogenes..." Law gulped. "I'm so sorry..."

The leader smiled through his tears. "I know, my Beloved. I know you are, and I rejoice..."

Many in the crowd were crying, caught by the emotional scene before them. Again, Kirk glanced at Spock and saw the Vulcan shift restlessly. Knowing that his friend was uncomfortable with such open display of feelings, Kirk reached over to touch his arm and smiled reassuringly. Spock looked away without responding to Kirk's gesture. At the platform, Diogenes and Law had parted, but Diogenes kept an arm around the old man's shoulder. They both faced the crowd, smiling.

"Rejoice with us, Beloveds." Diogenes beamed. "Share the joy of one of our own."

Law took a hesitant step forward and addressed the colonists. His voice was steady. "I have learned. I am free. I belong." He turned to face Diogenes, his eyes shining. "Diogenes has made it possible!"

The audience cheered and the two men raised their arms above their heads. At that moment, Anton looked up, glaring at Diogenes. Jory Law looked frightened, then he caught his son's attention. The boy turned and ran from the Rotunda.

"Jory, even as you have learned, he will learn, in time." Diogenes put an arm around Law. "Let him go for now. We will all meditate that Anton will be taught."

Again the colonists began singing the familiar, stirring melody, and the meeting came to a close.

"... Never had a home, never in my life... This place is my home for the rest of my life. Yes, the rest of my life..."

Kirk shivered, and his arm had begun to throb. He touched Spock.

"Come on. Let's get out of here."

The crowd began to methodically file out of the Rotunda. Most of them headed toward the dining area for the evening meal. Kirk and Spock didn't speak as they followed the others.

In the food line, Kirk reached out to take his plate, but a stab of pain in his shoulder made him fumble, nearly dropping the meal. Behind him, Spock noted the action and leaned over without speaking and took Kirk's plate and his own from the server. He carried the dishes, following Kirk as he led the way to two empty seats at the end of a long table. As they sat down, Spock placed the meal in front of Kirk and caught the look of appreciation.

"How did you hurt your shoulder?" Spock finally questioned.

"An accident out at the school project," Kirk explained. "A pulley gave way and some planks fell."

Spock had expected more, but he didn't press. He seemed to Kirk to be unusually quiet, withdrawn, and Kirk tried to stir his interest.

"I went over to the infirmary to have it treated." He spoke in a low tone. "The conditions there are very inadequate. There's only one doctor for the whole colony and his equipment is ... well, it would probably give Bones nightmares. Everything seems to be done with an eye for economy."

Spock frowned, concerned. "Are you sure you're all right?"

Kirk nodded. "Yes, this wasn't serious, but I don't know how confident I'd feel if it were something more dangerous." Again, he minimized the injury, trying to ignore the persistent throbbing.

Spock didn't comment. He looked back at his plate, absently toying with the food, but he didn't eat. Kirk found his own appetite less than hearty and the small, plain portions did nothing to entice him. He was worried about Spock's mood and feeling slightly nauseous from the pain in his shoulder. He pushed the food around on his plate for a few minutes, then looked over at Spock, who appeared to be lost in thought.

"I know the food's not very appealing," he encouraged, "but we should eat. It's a long time until the next meal."

Spock didn't seem to hear him. Growing more concerned, Kirk reached out with his good arm and closed his fingers over Spock's hand, which absently held an eating utensil.

"Spock, what is it? Are you all right?"

The Vulcan turned to face him and his eyes had a faraway look. "Yes, Jim, I'm all right."

"You're not eating."

Spock looked at his plate. "I'm afraid I don't have the desire to eat... this," he said flatly. Kirk looked at his own plate and put down his utensil.

"I guess I'm not very hungry tonight, either." He started to rise. "Shall we go?"

Spock rose with him and picked up the two uneaten plates of food. As he was about to deposit them in the waste receptacle, a colonist put out his hand to stop him. Spock drew back in surprise.

"You have not eaten your meal, brother," the colonist accused. "It is evil to waste."

Spock stared at the plates in his hands. He looked so stricken that Kirk was alarmed. Knowing he would be unable to hold the plates himself, he reached over and took Spock's arm, smiling warmly at the colonist.

"You're right, my friend," he said smoothly. "We're not hungry now, but we will be later. We'll take the plates back to our cabin and eat there."

Apparently satisfied, the man nodded and Kirk quickly guided Spock, still holding the dinners, out of the clearing. Spock took a breath and seemed to relax a little as they departed. Kirk watched him as they started up the path in the direction of their cabin.

"You okay now?"

Spock smiled slightly and looked down at the plates in his hands. "We should have known better than to throw food away in front of them, as scarce as it is." He looked bemused, then frowned. "What am I going to do with this, Jim?"

"Wait until we get back to the cabin and we'll ditch it where nobody can see," he suggested, relaxing a little at Spock's concern over the food.

"I'm not certain there is such a place in Goodhope." There was an edge to Spock's voice.

"Well, I admit it took some fast thinking back there to convince that man that you weren't going to throw the food away, when it was obvious that was your intention. You really froze on me. I thought for a minute you were going to throw the food on him and bolt out of there." Kirk's tone was just a little teasing.

Spock responded as he was expected with an indignant look and a cutting, "Jim, I assure you, I would never..."

Kirk interrupted with a look that was not quite so teasing. "I hope not. I don't know what the reaction here would be to that kind of behavior." Kirk studied Spock as they walked. "You're troubled by something," he observed.

Spock knew an answer was expected, but he wasn't sure how to express it or even if he could explain. He took a deep breath. "Everything *seems* so right. The things that are said, the attitudes and reactions..."

"But you're not sure they are," Kirk finished for him. "I know, I've felt it, too."

"At the meeting, tonight," Spock continued, "Law was so... emotional, and Diogenes..." Again Spock faltered, unable to express his reaction to the scene they had witnessed.

"Spock, I know it isn't easy for you to be surrounded by this kind of outward expression of emotion," Kirk said softly. "You know, it isn't even easy for Humans to see. It's... upsetting to witness someone so... so vulnerable and so sincere."

Spock nodded. "Yes. He is so commanding, so confident, and yet he does seem vulnerable. He does seem sincere."

Kirk looked at him sharply. "I was referring to Jory Law." Their eyes met and for an instant Spock seemed naked, revealed. He looked away.

"I thought you meant..."

"Spock," Kirk began thoughtfully, "Diogenes may be a wonderful man, or he may be a harmless fraud... or he may be a dangerous fanatic. Right now, there doesn't seem to be anything to tell us which. That's what we're here to find out, though. If we feel it's becoming too much to handle, we can abort the mission and Starfleet will have to find some other way."

Spock suddenly strode ahead, his voice edged with annoyance. "I see no reason to consider aborting the mission."

Speeding up his pace, Kirk fell into step beside the Vulcan. "If you do, you'll tell me, won't you, Science Officer?"

Spock stopped and gazed at Kirk, aware that the Human was favoring his injured shoulder. "Yes, Jim. I'll tell you."

Kirk smiled then, looking at the two plates of cold, unappetizing food that Spock still carried. Spock looked at the plates and shrugged.

"Jim, can we please hasten somewhere to 'ditch' this... this 'stuff'?"

* * * *

"... Damn..." Kirk swore as he fumbled one-handed with his clothes. When they had arrived at their cabin he had removed the protective sling, but the pain of movement still denied him use of the left hand and arm. In frustration, he finally capitulated. "Spock... help me with this."

Behind him, the Vulcan almost smiled, satisfied. Not five minutes ago, Kirk had insisted upon doing it himself, illogical though it was, turning down Spock's offer of assistance. Now,

he moved forward quickly to reach the places where Kirk's right hand could not.

"Is there much pain?" Spock could see the bruising around the bandaged area.

"Yes," Kirk admitted.

"Where is the ointment you said the doctor gave you?"

"In my pocket." Kirk sighed heavily, anticipating Spock's next remark. "Let me go wash up, then you can be my personal physician, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan's eyebrow inched up but he decided that a retort would be just what Kirk expected. Perversely, he kept silent.

Minutes later, Kirk returned, scrubbed and ready for bed, his shirt thrown across his arm. He eased into one of the hardback chairs at the table. Spock could tell by the pinched look around his eyes that the shoulder was hurting a lot more than he let on. Carefully, Spock undid the bandaging, tossing it aside.

"Hey - careful with that. We don't have any replacement... " Before Kirk could finish, Spock held up a pile of long cotton strips. Kirk recognized the fabric from an old garment.

"Always prepared, aren't you?" he teased.

"No, not always. I did not anticipate either of us being injured and needing medical supplies. We should have brought along an emergency case."

"Well, naturally, we assumed that the colony would provide adequate... *ouch!*" he ended abruptly as Spock flexed the injured joint.

"Hmnn... a very severe sprain," Spock mused clinically. "And a slight dislocation, which I just re-aligned. It should feel a bit more comfortable now."

"It does," Kirk marveled.

"Naturally."

"Ah, ah, watch out... your nasty Vulcan pride is showing," Kirk teased. Spock had begun to rub on the ointment; now, Kirk felt his hand hesitate. Twisting around to look up at him, Kirk read the pain and confusion in the soft eyes.

"That bothers you," he accused. "Why?"

Spock swallowed with difficulty. "Curious," he said slowly, "how insidiously pride can slip out, unrecognized until it is identified."

"Vulcans are a proud people," Kirk said carefully. "We Humans are, too. I won't deny that pride, no matter what Diogenes teaches."

"How can you be so sure that he is wrong?" Spock was thoughtful. "What he says is perfectly logical. Pride is vanity, vanity breeds contempt. Contempt for others is bigotry. A flawless equation."

Kirk was not considering the philosophical argument. His focus was on what effect the philosophy was having on Spock.

"The point is not whether Diogenes is right or wrong. We're here for a purpose, and we'll be returning to the Enterprise, to our real lives, soon."

"Then, what you are implying," Spock proceeded slowly, "is that the philosophy would not work outside Goodhope. That pride, thus bigotry, must exist in the Federation. Why?"

"Without pride, man cannot achieve. It's an integral part of our struggle. Spock, I don't agree that pride must equal bigotry. I can feel that I am excellent and at the same time believe that you are excellent, too. Different yet equal... isn't that the Vulcan belief, too?"

Spock was silent, considering. Kirk continued, more slowly, thoughtfully. "I'm not saying that these people are wrong... for them, perhaps, it's the only way to peace and personal contentment. But I think it would be a mistake for us. Our orders..." Kirk trailed off. *Orders. I see and condemn how Diogenes seems to order the people of Goodhope, how he controls their actions. And yet, aren't we all forced to obey, and in Starfleet, sometimes required to do unpleasant tasks.* The thought gave him pause.

Spock resumed the gentle massage on his shoulder, then began on the adjacent muscles, kneading the tenseness out of Kirk's neck and back. Kirk relaxed under the touch, filled with warmth and ease at the tactile sensations.

"Better?" Spock asked finally.

Kirk nodded and smiled affectionately at him. "Thank you, Mister Spock.

Perhaps, Kirk considered, I'm afraid I'll lose his loyalty. Is that it? I don't want Spock to become too attracted to Diogenes and his teaching because I must be in control, in command?

Kirk frowned, deciding he must be more tired than he had suspected. The constant bombardment of philosophy and introspection was debilitating. No wonder Jory Law had looked so haggard today.

With Spock's assistance, Kirk climbed the ladder into the loft. Soon, both were asleep.

Chapter Four

The next morning, Kirk was able to return to work. The night's rest had been beneficial and the pain in his shoulder was only a dull ache. At breakfast, he found that skipping the previous evening's meal had left his stomach very empty and he ate his small portion of the simple, hot, grainy cereal voraciously. Spock, too, seemed in better spirits and his appetite had apparently returned also.

That day and for the next several days, Kirk was busy from morning until the evening message. It was time for the colony to file their semi-annual report to the Federation and details of all aspects of colony life had to be recorded, evaluated, catalogued and accounted for.

Working closely with Diogenes, Kirk was continuously impressed by the leader's dedication. The man was everywhere, overseeing everything, and even Kirk found it difficult to keep up with his seemingly endless energy. There was no detail on which Diogenes did not seem informed, and in fact insisted upon being kept abreast of every aspect of life in the colony.

Diogenes was always in the office early, then he would go to the Rotunda to deliver the morning message after breakfast. He would return to the office, work until mid-day, then go on rounds of the colony with Caldin, often taking Kirk with them. They would finish rounds usually a little before the evening message, then, while the colonists ate, Diogenes returned to his office. After the evening meal, Diogenes visited circle groups or counceled individuals until curfew. Kirk learned that Diogenes often slept on the cot in his office after working there nearly all night. Kirk never saw him eat, although it was assumed he took his meals privately, he never seemed to tire, existed on very little rest, and was always busy with one activity or another. In addition to all this, Diogenes' emotional expenditure at the meetings twice a day seemed draining and often he was exhausted at the end, but a very short while afterward he was back working on something as though he had just had a full night's sleep. Kirk, too, was working long, full hours, yet he found keeping pace with Diogenes difficult.

During this time, Kirk had a chance to observe the leader under varying conditions and was drawn by the efficient operation of the man and the personal magnetism he exhibited. He was, above all things, an excellent leader, and Kirk could understand the unique demands it took to run a colony as he did.

On several occasions, however, Kirk was witness to another side of Diogenes. The man often seemed given to abrupt mood changes and Kirk suspected he was capable of great violence, subject to deep depression or total unreasonableness. Yet while these negative sides of Diogenes' personality occasionally surfaced, Kirk could remember the dark side of himself he once had been forced to face. It had been some of his own 'wolf's' traits, he had discovered, which made him an effective commander. Although he had a staff and aides, Diogenes had been carrying the full load of a struggling colony for several years, and Kirk was beginning to see the amount of responsibility that involved.

Kirk was in the office pouring over the work schedule, wondering how he could possibly get the new row of living quarters completed by the scheduled deadline in less than two weeks. Word had come that about fifty new seekers would be arriving to join the colony then, the result of a recent campaign by one of Diogenes' agents on Artus IV. The construction was behind, due to the breakdown of a piece of faulty equipment and two minor accidents, and Kirk had assigned extra hours to an already over-worked crew. Still, it did not seem that the job would be done on time, and because housing was crowded even now, Kirk despaired of what they would do with the new arrivals when they came. He scanned the schedule again, trying to see how he could juggle the available manpower to work around the clock on the job.

Diogenes strode through the door with Caldin following close behind. The colony leader was obviously very agitated.

"The man is a complete idiot," he stormed, crossing to the desk and pulling out a ledger tape. "Sanchos, Reeve and D'Tin - three men on the same job - have all been too ill to work for two days and Joseph didn't bother to report it."

Caldin sighed. "I didn't think Joseph capable of supervising that project when you gave him the position."

Diogenes slammed the tape into the viewer and looked up sharply at Caldin. "Don't try to tell me how to run this colony! Joseph was the only one qualified when I picked him. There's more to this than he's telling me. I'm not buying his story that he was too busy to notify us, and when I find out what he's hiding..." He stopped speaking suddenly as he became aware of Kirk over at the work table.

"Jim! I thought you were going out to the construction site to check on those new houses."

Kirk, feeling somewhat like an intruder, nodded. "I did, and they're still behind schedule. I came back to see if I could find any way to get more workers on the job."

Diogenes sighed and sat down in his chair. "More problems. When one thing goes wrong, it seems everything does. How far behind are they?"

"They're not going to make it in eleven days, unless I can keep the crew working all the time, and then it's still not certain," Kirk told him.

Diogenes looked at Caldin and the man crossed to peruse the schedule over Kirk's shoulder. The leader ran a hand over his eyes.

"Our people are overworked now. Caldin and I have just learned that three men on the irrigation project have taken ill. I'll have to visit them, see what's wrong."

Caldin looked as though he were about to object but said nothing. He walked over to the desk, poured a drink of juice and handed it to the leader. "When will you find time to do that, Diogenes?" he asked quietly.

Diogenes accepted the cup from him. "I will make the time. They will expect me to be there if there is need."

Kirk watched as Diogenes began to relax a little, understanding the pressure the man must be feeling. He checked the schedule again.

"If we stop work on the school, I can move that crew over to the housing project," he suggested. "It will only mean a slight delay, and maybe we can make up the time after the new colonists arrive."

Diogenes nodded. "The children are looking forward to their new building. I hate to disappoint them. But you're right, Jim. The houses are more important. Do what you think you must."

Kirk turned back to his work, intending to draw up a new time plan.

"Jim, you are very good at your job," Diogenes spoke thoughtfully. "You understand. You must have been very valuable to Starfleet."

Kirk looked up, choosing his words carefully. "Perhaps. There was a job to be done. I did it."

"No more than that?" When Kirk didn't answer immediately, Diogenes continued. "You feel things... deeply. You are affected by the plight of others, I think, more than yourself."

"It's not easy to always know the right decision," Kirk answered truthfully.

"Yes, decisions," Diogenes mused. "So many of them, so many lives affected by them. And have *you* decided how you feel about Goodhope, Jim?"

Kirk considered. "There's a lot of work to be done here. Maybe I can help."

"Oh, you can help a great deal," Diogenes assured. "But can we help you?"

"I hope so," Kirk said quietly.

"I hope so, too, Jim. Goodhope has need of men like you and your friend, Spock. But it is important that you accept our way of life as well. I do not think that we have convinced you." Diogenes regarded Kirk cautiously.

"Your philosophy, your messages are admirable, Diogenes," Kirk answered, "but many of your demands are difficult to conform to."

"You find it difficult to abolish pride, to yield your will," Diogenes observed.

Kirk was guarded against the man's almost uncanny perceptiveness. "Yes, at times."

Diogenes smiled. "Good. You are honest and you are not afraid. Honesty is the first step to understanding. And you will understand in time, Jim. When that time comes, you will be one of the most valuable believers our cause will have."

Kirk stood. "I'll go over to the school now, and tell the crew to complete today's work, then report to the housing project tomorrow."

Diogenes rose also. "Listen to the message tonight with an open mind, Jim. Now, I will go over and see what I can do for those sick men." He walked around the desk and came up to Kirk. Reaching out, he embraced him. "Thank you, Jim." Kirk pulled back, puzzled. "Sometimes being in charge is a lonely place. It is good to share with someone who understands." He moved past Kirk and out the door.

Following, Caldin paused at the door and turned. His expression was oddly distrustful, worried.

"Jim. Do not betray him. For all our sakes."

It was both a warning and a plea. Before Kirk had a chance to decipher his meaning and form an answer, Caldin left the office.

* * * *

Spock leaned back from the small porta-comp over which he had been huddled for the past hour and flexed aching muscles. Analysis was slow and tedious working with the old equipment, and the results were less accurate than Spock preferred. He thought wistfully of the dazzling array of efficient machinery aboard the Enterprise, which would have given him the answers he sought in a matter of seconds. What the lab in Goodhope had to offer was hardly better than nothing at all.

McCoy would have remarked, illogically, that the challenge of doing things the hard way was good for building character and Spock had to admit, reluctantly, that he found the work stimulating. His current assignment involved trying to find a way to make a barren patch of land on one end of the colony settlement suitable to yield crops. If they could farm this land, it would mean a sizable increase in the food supply, but so far the ground had been impossible to fertilize. Some of the soil's properties were similar to certain areas on Vulcan, and Spock suspected that if he could isolate and identify all the minerals, he could synthesize a derivative of one of the chemical compounds used on his home planet. With the tools on hand, however, the process of elimination and identification would probably take weeks.

Spock checked the chronometer on the wall. It was almost time to stop for the day and meet Jim for the evening message. Tired though he was, the Vulcan was almost tempted to keep working a little longer. He would have liked to have finished the current group of samples he had been studying and he was not anxious to sit through another of Diogenes' rousing speeches. The man, and the colonists' reactions to him, were more disturbing than Spock would allow himself to admit. Usually, here in the lab, engrossed in his scientific research, Spock could detach himself from the fervor of Goodhope Colony. In most other situations of life here, with which he was daily confronted, Spock found himself increasingly uneasy.

Kirk was the actor, adapting easily to any kind of circumstance and carrying off his role successfully. Spock was not so flexible, and it was a constant strain for him to maintain his cover and to join in the activities of the inhabitants, while still reconciling his Vulcan dictates.

Spock knew, however, he would have to attend the meeting. Being absent would be noticed by Diogenes, and he would be expected to explain his reason. It was made quite clear that work, no matter how much emphasis they put on its importance, was not an acceptable excuse for missing a message. Besides, Kirk would wonder and worry about why Spock had deliberately broken an established routine. Kirk was not easy to fool and he would guess that it was because Spock was troubled by the emotional gatherings.

The Vulcan laid down the stylus he had been using and began to straighten up his work table. Bereth-4, one of Diogenes' aides and a scientist, came through the door. The young human from Marconia had explained that he was so named to distinguish him from the other three members of his clan who were also called Bereth. Spock soon discovered that the man had a brilliant mind, yet he chose to minimize his abilities. He was totally devoted to Diogenes. Now, Bereth smiled happily.

"Finishing up, Spock? It's nearly time for the message."

"I am cleaning up," Spock told him, "but I am not finished. I would have liked to have been able to work a little longer."

Bereth came over to the table to watch. "Well, there's always tomorrow, but I know what you mean. Sometimes I get so engrossed in something, I hate to stop. But nothing is as important... or as exciting as hearing Diogenes' messages."

At first Spock did not comment, then he considered and decided to be candid. "It is also important that we find a way to produce more food. Diogenes' words will not fill the empty stomachs of a thousand people."

Bereth frowned. "Diogenes' messages are substance for our very being. It will not hurt if our bellies are less than full, but we would be severely lacking if we did not learn the truth of the way Man should live."

"It will hurt, Bereth, if you have not the strength to function. At the rate of food consumption - even the small rations each is allowed - and the rate of the growth of the colony, unless something is done soon, everyone will be starving in less than two years. You are a scientist, you have seen the figures."

"Diogenes is our strength." Bereth answered almost by rote. "He will provide for us."

"He has no magic power to produce food where there is none." Spock's tone was flat.

Again, Bereth smiled. "You're wrong, Spock. Diogenes has much magic power. Oh, perhaps

not to produce food, but to make a man look inside himself, to find a worth there, to know that we can belong, that being different is not wrong. He makes us see love and sharing, makes life beautiful and peaceful. How important is food for the body when compared to this feast for the mind?"

The lack of logic in Bereth's argument was appalling to Spock. For one so young and so brilliant to be so blindly devoted to a way of thinking that could prove dangerous to their physical well-being seemed incongruous. Yet Spock perceived a kind of fanaticism in the man's outlook, almost a desperation that had been searching for something and had found it fulfilled in Diogenes. Ironically, Spock could understand, at least partially, Bereth's devotion to someone who had offered him this fulfillment.

"When I was a child on Marconia," Bereth was saying, "I came from a poor and uneducated clan. My father and grandfather, my uncles and brothers, were all laborers. They put in long hours and their amusement was wild drinking and raucous pranks. I... I hated it. I didn't want to grow up like that... but I didn't know why. It was my heritage, why didn't I fit in? The men in my family ridiculed me. They called me a woman because I did not admire their carrying on. I wanted to be like them - to please them - but I couldn't. As I grew older, it became worse. They were ashamed of me, ashamed of my intelligence and I felt cursed for being born different.

"Then one day, Diogenes came to Marconia. I had left the house to escape the taunts of my brothers and their friends that day, but I had nowhere to go. I was wandering aimlessly, when I saw some of my relatives approaching and I knew if they saw me they'd begin using me as a scapegoat for their amusement, so I ducked into a building to escape detection. It was... a rally was going on, and Diogenes was speaking..." Bereth trailed off, remembering.

Spock was quiet, listening to the poignant story. Diogenes had saved Bereth and the young man worshipped him. Spock considered the dynamic, gentle being who was the leader of Goodhope, and the words he offered to his people as truth. It was not difficult to see why Bereth felt as he did, and Spock shivered at his own insight into the motivation of others.

He moved to put away the last of his equipment. "It is time to leave. We do not want to be late for Diogenes," he said quietly.

Bereth smiled, observing the Vulcan. "Spock, you understood what I was talking about, didn't you? What it was like growing up feeling out of place, then finding someone who accepts you, cares for you, doesn't ask you to be what you're not - you know about that."

"Yes," Spock admitted slowly to the open, sincere young man. "I know about that."

Bereth waited for Spock to come around from behind the work table. "I'll walk with you to the Rotunda until you meet your friend, Jim."

Chapter Five

Time passed in the routine pattern of Goodhope. The night before the expected arrival of the new colonists, Spock had some soil samples and computer print-outs which he had to take out to the landing strip to be included with the things to be sent back to the Federation in the return shuttle the next day. He had prepared the data and needed verification from the Science University in the sector that his conclusions were correct. The equipment available in Goodhope could not give him the information, and even though it would be at least a month before the answers came back, it was the only way to learn if it would be possible to use certain chemicals to fertilize the unworkable soil. Spock reasoned that even though he and Kirk would be gone from Goodhope before the information was received, Bereth could use it to continue the work they had started.

When Spock had informed Diogenes of his theory, the leader had suggested he send it out with the shipment the colony had prepared. The craft would be taking back to the Federation requisitions for parts for some broken machinery, information leaflets which were prepared in Goodhope for distribution at rallies throughout the Federation, and a few personal communications from colonists who had relatives living in the area of the ship's destination. The bulk of reports and supply requests would be sent later, when the official ship arrived for their semi-annual visit.

After the evening meal, Spock gathered his samples and he and Kirk went out to the clearing where the shipment was waiting. They deposited it with the overseer and started back to their cabin. It was just beginning to get dark. As the two men were leaving the landing field, they heard the sound of someone running. In a few seconds, they saw Anton Law coming toward them. He stopped about three feet away, looking startled to see them. Then his eyes darted about, fell on a large boulder, and he made a quick decision.

"All I ask from you is your silence," he said defiantly. Then, without waiting for an answer, he ducked out of sight behind the rock. Kirk and Spock hardly had time to form an opinion when six men, whom they knew to be some of Diogenes' staff, came running up. They stopped in front of the two Starfleet officers.

"Did you see a young boy - Anton Law - come by here?" one called Xervia asked. Kirk threw a quick glance at Spock, then shook his head.

"No," he lied. "Why are you looking for him?"

Xervia and the others gave the area a cursory look. "He ran away. Diogenes wishes to speak with him. His family is worried. Are you sure you didn't see him? He was headed in this direction."

"We have seen no one go past us." Spock stretched the truth. "Ran away... to where?"

Xervia laughed. "That is the joke. There is no place on this planet except Goodhope. But the boy does not use his head." He turned to the other men. "Come on, we'll keep looking to please Diogenes, but Anton will come back anyway when he finds out there's nothing out there."

One of the men frowned. "He is a transgressor, and nothing but trouble. Diogenes has been patient with him too long. I don't think he will be so lenient anymore. Anton knows he will need to be taught. He will stay away rather than face Diogenes."

"What will Diogenes do to him if he is found?" Kirk asked.

"He will do what is best for everyone, and for Anton," Xervia answered. "Let us know if you do see him." He turned to the others. "Let's go."

Kirk and Spock watched until the men were out of sight, then they moved as one to the boulder where Anton was hiding. He stood as they approached and looked about, ready to dart away. Kirk grabbed his arm.

"All right, what's this all about?"

Anton stared at them, distrusting. "Why didn't you tell them? You'll be in trouble with Diogenes if he finds out you lied."

"I got the impression you didn't want us to give you away," Kirk snapped. "And obviously you're already in trouble with Diogenes."

"That's my concern," Anton answered. "If you'll just leave now, you needn't become any more involved."

"Since, by protecting you, we are involved," Spock reasoned, "perhaps you'd better explain where you are going. If what Xervia says about your running away is correct, there is nowhere to go on this planet."

Anton frowned. "There's a shuttle due here tomorrow. When it leaves, I'll be hidden aboard. That is, unless you turn me in," he challenged.

"We'll decide that when we know your side of the story," Kirk promised. "Why are you trying to leave, and why do you feel you have to sneak away? Perhaps if you talked with your parents..."

"Are you kidding? What good would that do?" Anton's voice was bitter. "My father and mother are blinded by Diogenes. They wouldn't dare disobey him. They're his puppets. Didn't you see what happened to my father when he tried to cover for me before?"

"Anton, why did your father feel he had to cover for you?" Kirk asked suddenly.

"Haven't you heard? I'm a transgressor. I don't buy Diogenes' lies, his false goodness. He has everyone believing in him... well, almost everyone. And those who think differently are too terrified to do or say anything about it."

"Terrified?" Spock questioned. "What is it you believe will happen if someone disagrees with Diogenes?"

"They'll be punished, of course. Tortured, beaten, or worse... he can't be resisted in Goodhope."

Kirk and Spock exchanged glances. "Have you seen this happen?" Kirk wanted to know. He was remembering the accusations he and Spock were here to investigate.

Anton shook his head. "No, I haven't *seen* it. Diogenes is too clever for that."

"Then how do you know - " Spock began.

"I have seen the results," Anton cut in. "Someone does something wrong, opposes Diogenes ... they disappear for several days. Diogenes says they must meditate to purge themselves. Does meditation cause welts on their backs, bruises, cuts? Does purging oneself mean no food until you have repented and renounced your 'transgression'? Do you think my father was simply left alone for a week in the shed? Do you think they fed him?"

"Did he tell you they mistreated him?" Kirk pressed.

Again, Anton shook his head. "No, but he didn't have to. I saw how weak he had become, I saw the bruises on his body. He said it was from throwing himself on the floor with shame and remorse! I say it was from one of Diogenes' men and a hard stick!"

"But if you did not see it," Spock charged, "and your father denies it..."

Anton threw him a disgusted look. "You asked. I knew you wouldn't believe it. You're just like all the others." He started to turn away. "It doesn't matter. If you all want to be slaves to Diogenes, that's your business. I'm getting out."

Kirk put out an arm to prevent the boy from leaving. "What about your parents? If what you believe is true, are you going to run out and desert them?"

Anton hesitated for a moment, then shrugged. "They'll be all right without me around to cause trouble for them. They're devoted to Diogenes. They'll be happy here."

"Where will you go?" Spock asked.

"I don't know. I have an uncle on Deneva. If I can get there, I think he'll let me stay."

"Then, why don't you go to Diogenes?" Kirk suggested. "Tell him what you want to do. Maybe he can talk to your parents for you..."

The youth looked incredulous. "Diogenes! Don't you understand? Diogenes will not let me leave. He doesn't let *anyone* leave. It's not my parents who will stop me..."

"People *have* left Goodhope," Kirk challenged. "They've come back to the Federation and..." He stopped abruptly, catching himself before he revealed too much. Anton didn't seem to notice.

"In the beginning, some left," he explained. "Then, fewer and fewer. Now... no one leaves Goodhope." He stared pointedly at Kirk. Kirk felt an uneasy tingle at the base of his

skull. Anton continued, resigned. "Look, I have to get out of here. Goodhope is not for me. If I stay, I'll only get in more trouble and get my parents in trouble, too. He's forbidden me food now, because I refuse to work sixteen hours a day digging rocks up out of this stinking soil - my punishment for a past transgression. When my parents learn I can get no food, they'll try to save portions of theirs for me, or I'll be forced to steal to keep from starving. Please ... let me go now." He tried to pull away. "You helped me... thank you. You look like honest men. I hope you find what you're looking for in Goodhope."

Kirk and Spock stood back to let him pass and Anton ran off toward the air strip. Kirk looked over at the Vulcan.

"I hope we don't." At Spock's questioning eyebrow, he clarified, "Find what we're looking for." Spock didn't answer. As they turned to leave, they saw the six men who had been chasing Anton coming toward them again and this time, Caldin was with them.

"You fools!" Caldin was obviously annoyed at the men. "He is most likely hiding at the landing field to attempt to stowaway on the space craft tomorrow. In your haste, you do not use your heads! There is no need to rush. He can go nowhere." Caldin looked over as he saw Kirk and Spock. "Why are you out here this time of evening?"

Spock began to explain their purpose for being there, but Xervia cut him off.

"They were here earlier when we came by," he accused. "I asked them, but they said they didn't see Anton. Why are they still here?"

"It's a nice night," Kirk explained quickly. "We were just enjoying the walk before returning to our cabin."

Caldin peered closely, and Kirk couldn't tell if he had convinced him or not. "Well, this is not the time to be dallying. You'd better get on home. It's almost curfew," he reminded.

Kirk glanced at the other men, then back to Caldin. "You haven't found Anton Law?"

Caldin frowned and looked at the others. "The young mischief-maker eludes grown men and has them running in circles. But don't worry, we'll have him back where he belongs soon. We're on our way to the landing field. He'll be there."

"What makes you think that's where he is?" Kirk tried to stall them.

Caldin's eyes narrowed. "You ask many questions, my friend. Do not concern yourself with matters that are not your affair." His voice held an edge of caution. "Go to your house and let us take care of Anton."

"If the boy is not happy in Goodhope," Spock stated, "is it not illogical to prevent him from leaving?"

Caldin smiled quickly. "If a child were reaching for a hot flame, would you not prevent him from harming himself, Spock? Children seldom know what is best for them. If it were up to me, I'd tend to agree with you. Let the rascal learn the folly of his actions the hard way. But I am not the teacher. Diogenes worries so about each of his children. He cares for them so much. If you can't understand that, I suggest you talk to him, not me. I merely carry out his wishes. Now, please, go home, both of you. The hour grows late."

Caldin and the others waited until Kirk and Spock turned to move in the direction of the colony, then the hunters headed toward the landing strip.

Kirk and Spock walked slowly, listening, and when the men were out of sight in the opposite direction, Kirk stopped and put out a hand to Spock.

"Wait," he said, still listening. Not hearing anything, he turned and motioned Spock back the way they had come. "Let's go."

Spock hesitated. "Jim, do you think that's wise? If we're discovered, it could prove embarrassing."

Kirk smiled. "We'll be careful. Don't you want to know what happens to Anton?"

The Vulcan was thoughtful. "Perhaps the boy exaggerates... "

"Spock... " Kirk was exasperated with his friend. "We'll worry about that later. Now, are you coming with me or not?" He walked away. Without any further hesitation, Spock followed.

As they approached the landing strip, Kirk and Spock could hear voices just outside the supply shed. Three of the men came around from the back, two of them holding on to Anton Law, who struggled between them, and the third was walking behind.

"Here!" one of them shouted. "Over here. We've got him!"

Spock grabbed at Kirk's arm and pulled him out of sight behind some piled up crates, just as Caldin and the other three men ran up from behind them to join those who had Anton. The two men behind the crates had a clear view of the action.

"I thought so!" Caldin shouted. "I told you he would be here!"

Anton tried to pull free. "Let me go. Take your hands off me!"

Caldin watched the boy in amusement. "He fights like a wild tormack," he laughed, then he frowned sternly. "Be still, Anton."

"I won't go back!" Anton shouted. "You can't make me. I'll run away again." He kicked out with one foot and made contact with the shin of one of the men in front of him.

"Stop it, Anton," Caldin commanded. The two men holding Anton tightened their grip. The man who had been kicked recovered and started toward the boy.

"Why, you little... let me at him!"

Caldin stepped between them. "Logan, no!" He turned to face Anton. "You're making this worse for yourself. Diogenes will not be pleased when he hears of your actions."

"Diogenes be damned! Let me go!" Again he kicked out toward Caldin, but the man avoided the movement. His eyes narrowed and he made a motion. One of the men behind Anton reached out with his foot and pulled the boy's feet from under him. Anton dropped to his knees, the other two men still securing his arms. Caldin reached over and grabbed the boy's hair, jerking his head up roughly.

"You are trouble, Anton Law - a wicked boy. This is where you belong - on your knees, and you will be groveling with your face in the dirt before Diogenes is finished with you!"

Behind the crate, Kirk made a move to rise from where they crouched. Spock grabbed his arm.

"No, Jim. Don't interfere," he cautioned.

"There are seven men against one boy," Kirk whispered.

"I know, but we must not let them see us," Spock told him. "We cannot arouse suspicion now." Kirk was torn for a moment, then he accepted the Vulcan's logic and settled back uneasily.

Caldin let go of Anton's hair. "Get him to his feet and bring him along."

As the men started to lift Anton, the boy pulled back violently, taking them by surprise. He managed to jerk one arm free and swing out, hitting his other captor in the shoulder. The man hung on and three others jumped Anton, knocking him to the ground and pinning him there. Caldin stared down at him, fury in his eyes.

"You must be taught the hard way, mustn't you?"

Anton stared up at Caldin, terrified, realizing the hopelessness of his position. "You are going back to Diogenes," Caldin continued, "and since you insist upon resisting, you do understand..." Anton began to sob, the fight suddenly gone out of him. He looked like a frightened child.

"Please... please, no. Don't take me back..." he begged.

Caldin ignored the pleas. He turned to one of the men who was not holding Anton. "Get some rope to bind him. We'll have no more of this fighting."

The man went into the supply shed as Anton continued to sob. In a few minutes, he was back with a length of rope. Anton struggled as two of them secured his wrists and ankles, then pulled him to a standing position. When he was on his feet, Anton glared at Caldin.

"You monster! Is this the treatment your lying Diogenes teaches? You blind followers, have you no minds of your own?" At first it seemed that Caldin was ignoring his words. He turned his back on him, then suddenly leaned over, picked up a rock and whirled, smashing it on the side of the boy's head. Anton slumped, unconscious. The two men held on to him, preventing him from hitting the ground.

"Let's go," Caldin said. "He'll give us no more trouble now." He walked away and the others followed, dragging Anton between them.

Behind the crate, Kirk and Spock waited tensely, until the others were out of sight. Spock's hand on Kirk's shoulder was a reminder for them to keep their silence, although Kirk wasn't sure that Spock would not have physically restrained him if he had attempted to follow his instinct to intercede in the incident. He knew Spock was right, knew the Vulcan was feeling the same frustration as he at not being able to stop what they had witnessed. It was important to their mission that they be accepted as true believers, yet it was not in their nature to watch and do nothing when the odds were seven against one. Without speaking, they left their hiding place and headed back to their cabin.

* * * *

Kirk was restless. He paced the cabin fitfully as he had been doing for the past hour. Spock sat in one of the wooden chairs, his hands folded on the table in front of him. The room was dimly lit by a small lamp. The door was securely closed. It was past curfew.

"I should go down to the office right now and confront Diogenes," Kirk threatened.

"And how would you explain what you saw?" Spock's eyes clouded with concern.

"I'll think of something. I want to know if Anton is all right."

"Perhaps you should 'think of something' before you go," Spock suggested. Kirk stopped pacing and stared at him, a question in his eyes. The Vulcan sighed. "Yes, I am concerned over the boy's condition also, Jim, but I do not think that confronting Diogenes in this manner will bring any results. And you and I both know it could jeopardize our mission here."

"Our mission here is to find out if the people are being mistreated. We've just seen an example of that happening. If Diogenes is what he says he is, and Caldin acted on his own, then Diogenes should know about it."

"But if Caldin were acting under Diogenes' orders," Spock countered, "then revealing ourselves could be very dangerous."

"How do we know which is true?" Kirk began to pace again. "Are the things Anton accused him of the product of an overactive imagination of a young boy...?"

"Or the desperate truth of a terrified prisoner?" Spock finished. "Perhaps we should consider what we actually saw."

"We saw those men tie him up. We saw Caldin hit him with a rock."

"We also saw the boy resisting violently, hitting, kicking... "

"Against seven men?" Kirk challenged.

"Caldin tried to reason with him. He appeared reluctant to use force."

Kirk looked at him sharply. "Who's side are you on?"

"I am on neither side, Jim. I am merely trying to ascertain what we know and what we have conjectured by our reactions to the incident."

"Well, my reactions are pretty violent right now, Mr. Spock." Kirk grimaced.

Spock studied his hands. "Yes, I know."

"Damn it!" Kirk took a breath. "You can be very annoying at times."

At his Captain's angry scowl, Spock looked up. "Jim, I understand that you are frustrated. I am merely trying to look at this reasonably." Kirk came around and took the chair opposite Spock, studying his friend thoughtfully.

"Yes, I am frustrated," he admitted. "And what are *you* feeling, Spock?"

The Vulcan unclenched his hands and leaned back in his chair, considering before he answered. "I... I am not certain whom I believe..." he began, hesitant. "What the boy told us contained many of the same accusations as the reports we viewed before we came here. Yet... while the colony is poor, lacking in many ways... we have seen no positive evidence of such occurrences. Even Anton admitted he had no proof. For the most part, the people seem content..."

"And Diogenes?" Kirk prompted. Again, Spock hesitated.

"Diogenes is a bit erratic, perhaps even obsessed in some of his beliefs, but he does not seem malicious or cruel..."

"Not that we've been able to see."

"No, not that we've been able to see," Spock admitted.

Kirk sighed. "So, where does that leave us? Three weeks of our time has gone by and we've learned no more than we knew when we came here. Is that what you're saying?"

"Not precisely. It seems we have learned some things." His eyes met Kirk's. Agitated, the Captain stood again and paced the square, small room.

"God, this place is small! No windows... I want to go for a walk. What time is it?"

"Past curfew."

Kirk came back and sat in the chair, running a hand over his lips. "Spock, those men hurt that boy tonight."

Spock stood and walked over to pour a cup of water from the pitcher. He brought it back and sat it on the table in front of Kirk.

"Perhaps we should send a transmission to Starfleet, Captain," he suggested.

Kirk picked up the cup and took a drink. "And what shall I tell them this time? A teenaged boy tried to run away from home and some men were sent to bring him back. He resisted and they had to subdue him. Doesn't that happen everywhere in the galaxy? Damn, Spock, am I losing my objectivity? Is everything suspect? The Federation wants proof, but suppose there is none."

"Then it is our duty to evaluate what we observe, draw conclusions based on those observations, and make recommendations."

Kirk was thoughtful. "I'm not sure I can do that. I'm not sure I can remain detached from what is happening. I'm not an android, Spock, a computer collecting data. I know what our mission is, my duty to Starfleet, but these are *people*, good and sincere people. Their lives are all bound up in Goodhope and Diogenes. How can I judge what is right for them?"

Troubled, Spock walked away. "Jim, we were selected for this mission because Starfleet trusted our ability to remain objective. Diogenes' philosophy is noble, but..."

"But maybe it doesn't work for everybody," Kirk concluded. He read the tension in the Vulcan's eyes and knew they were both too agitated to think clearly. He forced himself to relax. "All right..." He smiled to ease his friend. "Come over and sit down. I'll make the transmission, then we'll go to bed." Spock complied, and Kirk activated the transmitter.

Kirk to Enterprise. Tonight Commander Spock and myself witnessed an incident that was disturbing to us, yet inconclusive in its meaning... He related the facts about Anton Law, including what the boy had told them and checking with Spock to see that he did not leave out anything. Then, watching the Vulcan carefully, he added, *Tomorrow I plan to talk to Diogenes about it.* Kirk out. Spock lifted an eyebrow but voiced no objection.

"Now," Kirk switched off the transmitter and stood, stretching, "let's get some sleep. Those new colonists arrive tomorrow, and I have a feeling it's going to be a full day."

* * * *

Although he was physically tired, Kirk found sleep impossible. He couldn't keep Anton Law out of his thoughts. When the morning alarm sounded, Kirk was on his feet instantly, driven by the same urge to act that he had felt the night before. Spock looked over from his own sleeping area as Kirk rolled over, and Kirk knew instinctively that the Vulcan had not slept much either.

"Long night, eh?" Kirk greeted.

Spock made an exasperated face. "The same number of hours as usual..."

"You know what I mean."

Kirk washed quickly and dressed. He was ready before Spock and he waited impatiently as Spock climbed down from the loft.

"I'm going over to see Diogenes," he told him. Spock scampered down the ladder, still fastening his shirt.

"Before breakfast?"

Kirk nodded. "Yes, he's always in the office early. I'll see you at the Rotunda."

"Let me come with you," Spock offered.

"No... no, I think it will be better if I talk to him alone. I'll be careful what I say."

"Jim..." Spock started to object.

"It will be okay. I'm just going to talk with him. What are you afraid Diogenes will do? Aren't you the one who said he isn't malicious or cruel?" He caught Spock's look of skepticism. "I work with him every day. I know how to handle him," he reassured.

Chapter Six

When Kirk reached Diogenes' office, he was surprised to find it a center of activity. Diogenes was usually alone before the morning message, but today there were several people there and all seemed very busy. Kirk was a bit dismayed to find Caldin present, also. Hesitating only a moment, Kirk crossed to the desk where Diogenes was seated watching a tape on his viewer. He did not seem to notice as Kirk approached and stood in front of him.

"Diogenes..." Kirk called his attention, "I have to speak with you."

The leader looked up. "Oh, Jim, I'm glad you're here early. Leiis is having some difficulty understanding those placement charts you made up and she has six people coming that she doesn't know where to assign."

Kirk would not be deterred. "About Anton Law." Diogenes looked up sharply. "I want to know what happened to him."

Diogenes looked puzzled for a moment, then he nodded. "Yes... Caldin said he saw you last night when they were looking for him." He smiled. "He's back. I'm sure you were concerned, but he was found, thank goodness."

"Where is he?" Kirk pressed.

Diogenes hesitated, studying the other man, then he turned back to his viewer. "Jim, we're very busy this morning. The seekers will be arriving before mid-day. Please help Leiis with her placement problem."

Kirk stood his ground. "Where is Anton Law this morning? Just tell me that. Is he all right?" he demanded.

Diogenes turned back, and Kirk could see annoyance in the clear green eyes. He was dressed in his customary white, and the veins along the side of his neck were taut above the low neckline of his cotton tunic.

"I needn't tell you anything about Anton Law," he said deliberately. "But, yes, of course he's all right."

"Is he home with his parents?"

Although his eyes were flashing, Diogenes' voice was quiet. "Jim, you really have picked the wrong time to bring up this subject. I told you I was busy."

"Then just give me a straight answer. Is Anton back with his parents this morning?"

"I don't think I like the tone of your voice, Jim," the leader warned.

"I don't like several things I've seen and heard. Including your evasiveness."

Abruptly, Diogenes stood and looked past Kirk. "My friends," he addressed the others in the room, "I know you are all busy, but Jim has a problem he needs to discuss with me. Will you all leave us alone for a while."

Caldin looked up at the leader's voice, aware of Kirk for the first time. He stared without comprehension at the intruder, trying to gauge the reason for his presence, then looked toward Diogenes.

"Must it be now? We have so much to do," Caldin objected.

"It is necessary, Caldin. We will not be long." Diogenes nodded to his aide. As Caldin and the others filed out of the office, Diogenes confronted Kirk.

"Why does Anton Law earn so much of your interest?"

"I saw him last night. He seemed frightened." Kirk chose his words carefully.

"You saw him? When? Where?" Diogenes snapped.

"Out at the landing field. He said he wanted to leave Goodhope."

The leader glared at Kirk. "You spoke with him? You told Caldin you had not seen him. Did you lie?"

Kirk ignored the questions. "Why won't you let him leave Goodhope?"

Diogenes took a breath, seeming to will himself to relax. "He belongs with his parents. They

are old, they need him." His voice was reasonable.

"Is that where he is? Is he back with them now?" Diogenes did not reply. "Why do you refuse to answer that question? What has happened to him?"

"Nothing has happened to him," Diogenes said finally. "He will be back with his parents soon."

"Did you know that Caldin hit him? Did you know they tied him with a rope?"

Diogenes shut his eyes, seeming to gather himself together. "Jim..." he spoke at last, and his voice was a study of controlled anger. "I have been more than patient with you. I have listened to what amounts to very vicious accusations. I am prepared to overlook this outburst and the fact that you've admitted to deliberately lying. But this is something about which you know nothing. Do not continue with this conversation. Go do your job and we will speak of it no more."

"Not until I know about Anton Law," Kirk persisted. At first he did not think Diogenes would respond, then the leader shook his head sadly.

"He is being punished for his actions. He must be taught the evil of his transgressions."

"They kicked him, tied him up, knocked him unconscious," Kirk accused. "Seven men!"

"He resisted. He would not return willingly."

"He's only a boy!"

"Yes," Diogenes agreed. "A boy who needs to learn."

"By brutality?"

Suddenly, Diogenes became enraged. His nostrils flared, his hands clenched, and his voice was like ice. "How dare you! How dare you presume to understand what it takes to save these people! You, who still have not learned to yield his will, who still clings to his own destructive self-pride. You came here seeking and I took you in. What do you know of the sacrifices I have made to teach a better way of life? If you cannot learn to trust me, get out! Leave Goodhope today on the return shuttle. Take all your possessions and go!"

Kirk was startled for a moment by the man's outburst. Then he said, quietly, "Why won't you give Anton Law the same choice?"

Before Diogenes had a chance to answer, he turned toward the door.

* * * *

When Kirk arrived at the Rotunda, he found Spock seated on the ground about halfway back from the platform. The Vulcan was looking around and Kirk saw him relax when he caught sight of his Captain coming toward him. Kirk dropped down beside his friend, noting the Vulcan's expression of curiosity.

"He's being 'punished for his transgressions'," Kirk answered the unspoken question.

"Did Diogenes tell you that?"

"Yes, somewhat reluctantly, though." Kirk leaned closer to Spock. "He knew what Caldin did to the boy, too."

Spock looked puzzled. "He admitted that to you, also?"

"He wasn't surprised when I told him what we saw," Kirk replied. Spock seemed troubled.

"You admitted we were there?" At Kirk's nod, he asked, "What did he say to that?"

Kirk met his friend's eyes. "He told me that if I couldn't trust him, to get my things and

leave Goodhope - today." Kirk waited for Spock's reaction. The Vulcan considered for a moment, then all he said was, "Indeed?"

They had no chance to talk any more, for Diogenes entered, followed by Caldin, Bereth, Hand and Xervia. He ascended to the podium and smiled out over the assembly. Kirk was once more struck by what an impressive figure he presented. Dressed in his simple, immaculate white, his long yellow hair reaching his shoulders, the clear green eyes and the gentle, loving smile, he towered above the others, his height accented by his appearance at the podium. He was a man in control of his destiny, a man who would meet any crisis with determination. He was compassionate, understanding. He was at times vulnerable, yet in that very vulnerability lay his strength. It was not difficult to see why his followers trusted him so... and he had told Kirk that if he could not trust him, he was to leave.

Diogenes called for the opening meditation, followed by the daily litany. Then he quieted the audience and began the message.

"A wonderful thing is happening today!" The crowd stirred in anticipation of his words about the arriving seekers. He did not disappoint them. "We prepare to welcome fifty new members to our home - fifty beings who have heard our message on far-away worlds and have been moved to join us in Goodhope! Our truth spreads throughout the galaxy! Our words are received and believed. There *is* hope for those who have been lost, alone... alienated. No one is alien in Goodhope!" Again the crowd stirred, fired by his statements.

Diogenes was driven, his message more volatile than usual. He continued to speak, encouraging the audience to respond. He seemed to become more excited, as though he were being charged with electricity at the rapport he was building. He expounded the virtues of honesty and dedication, the destructiveness of pride and self-will. He urged the colonists to welcome the new seekers, to be certain they felt they belonged. He damned the agony of prejudice and bigotry.

The message went on and on; Diogenes, the skillful master, led his pupils to heights of exhilaration and plunged them to depths of sorrow. He evoked remorse, repentance, and promised forgiveness. He reminded them of their beginnings, before there was a Goodhope, when they had, in some way, known the grief of feeling alone and different from others. Many cried, remembering, and Diogenes wept with them. He lifted their spirits, praising Goodhope and their accomplishments there, emphasising the experience of sharing, of belonging and of being accepted. The listeners embraced each other, and Diogenes embraced them all with his eyes, his expressions. Then he warned against transgressions, charging secret, destructive thoughts and attitudes harbored by each less-than-perfect seeker. He dug at their minds, declaring their need to purge themselves of evil tendencies. The audience squirmed uneasily, filled with guilt, and Diogenes was magnanimous, offering understanding and love despite their failings, reassuring them of their individual worth.

This was one of the mornings when Diogenes elected to speak with them before they ate, and today the message ran long past the usual time and into the breakfast hour. Still, Diogenes did not dismiss them. Many felt the pangs of hunger, but the feeling was ignored as they fed on the banquet of his teaching.

Kirk observed in fascination, aware that Spock, too, found the performance amazing. They had never seen Diogenes so inspired, his dynamic personality a magnificent display of control and power. Watching, Kirk felt an uncomfortable twinge of apprehension as he was impressed most emphatically by what an awesome force this man could be. He was suddenly impatient to leave the Rotunda, to escape the fervor and excitement of Diogenes and his followers. He looked over at Spock. The Vulcan was tense, his fists clenched tightly at his sides. He stared straight ahead but he seemed to be withdrawn, as though concentrating on blocking out the sights and sounds around him. Kirk knew the experience of this message must be worse for him than the others had been, and Spock had always found the gatherings difficult. Kirk took a breath and kept his place; there was no way they could just get up and walk out during a meeting. Trapped for the moment, Kirk forced his attention back to the leader, damning Diogenes, damning his foolish believers, damning Goodhope and those accusing reports that had sent Spock and himself here.

It was nearly the end of the breakfast hour, nearly the time the colonists would be expected to report to their jobs, when Diogenes finally let them go. Kirk grabbed Spock's arm and ushered them quickly out of the Rotunda. He darted for the dining area, pulling the unresisting Vulcan with him.

"Damn," Kirk swore. "He picks the morning we're most busy to deliver an exceptionally dramatic message. There will hardly be time to eat. I think it was deliberate. He knows the amount of work to be done."

Spock nodded. He, too, was more than a little annoyed. "Indeed. If it were not deliberate, it was at least a very poor judgment of timing." He followed Kirk into the breakfast line. "Why would he select this particular morning to detain us so long at the gathering?"

Kirk shrugged and took his plate from the server. "I don't know, but he was very angry with me when I left his office." They carried their food to one of the tables and sat down across from each other. Spock leaned forward.

"You believe he vented his anger at you in the intensity of his speech, subjecting the whole colony to a subtle lesson..."

"Perhaps. He didn't have much time to cool off. Maybe it was a combination of my questions and the whole incident with Anton last night. Maybe it was the pressure of the new arrivals today. Maybe he was simply inspired, but something was driving him - in several directions."

Spock put down his eating utensil and studied Kirk. "Jim, what are you going to do now?"

"Do? I have to go to the office and straighten out the placement list for Leiis. She's unclear about some of my directions."

"I meant about Diogenes' telling you to leave Goodhope."

"If I couldn't trust him," Kirk clarified. Spock waited for the rest of the answer. "Obviously, we can't test to find out if he meant it, can we?" Kirk stood. "I have to go now. The new people will be arriving and Leiis won't know where to assign them."

"Jim..." Spock was concerned. "Does this mean you'll trust him?"

Kirk smiled a warm reassurance. "It means I have a job to do, Spock."

"For Diogenes?"

Kirk sighed, troubled. "For the Federation," he corrected. "I'll see you later."

* * * *

When Kirk returned to the office, Diogenes wasn't there. Kirk went over the files with Leiis, then the two of them went out to the houses to check on the last stages of their readiness for occupancy.

Spock, who was not directly involved with the arrival of the new colonists, had gone to the lab after breakfast. He had been working about an hour when Bereth came in, announcing that the ship had landed and the fifty seekers were being processed. The two scientists then worked together for the rest of the afternoon. Bereth was excited, anticipating the evening message, which would be directed at welcoming the new people to Goodhope. He chattered constantly, and to Spock the young man's presence was an irritant as he tried to work. Usually, Bereth's company was interesting, but today the Vulcan was worried about Kirk and what might happen should the Captain and Diogenes encounter each other after this morning's confrontation. There was nothing Spock could do, however, so he endured the long afternoon with little patience.

About an hour before the evening message, Spock found himself watching the time and sharing, for once, Bereth's eagerness for the gathering in the Rotunda. His motive, however, was quite different. He looked forward to meeting Jim and seeing for himself that his worry had been unfounded.

Spock heard the door to the lab open and looked up from his bio-comp. Diogenes stood just inside the room. The colony leader seemed tired and was not quite as immaculate as he normally appeared. It was apparent that he had put in a long and busy day. Bereth responded with surprise and pleasure at seeing him. It was not often that their teacher visited the lab.

"Diogenes, come in," the young man beckoned enthusiastically. "This is an unexpected joy!"

Diogenes came toward them, smiling kindly at Bereth. "The joy would be mine if I were here merely to observe your work and discuss your findings. However, my schedule does not permit me such time today." He glanced over at Spock. "I must talk with Spock before the message. Would you mind leaving us alone for awhile, my young and brilliant friend?"

Bereth nodded and began to hastily put away his things. "Of course, Diogenes."

It was obvious to Spock that the scientist adored his leader. As Bereth left, Spock began straightening his work table, certain that he would get no time to do any more before he quit for the day. The action also served to cover the apprehension he was feeling, wondering what it was Diogenes wanted. The leader did not keep him in suspense for long.

"The space craft has left Goodhope. Jim was not on it."

Spock let out an imperceptible breath and stopped his task. His eyes were unreadable as he faced Diogenes. "Is there some reason he should have been?" He decided to let Diogenes take the lead.

"Come, now, Spock, I know you two are close. He told you what I said to him this morning. If he is not content here in Goodhope, I do not want him to remain." The leader's tone was challenging, waiting for a reaction. Spock inclined his head slightly.

"Why are you telling me this?"

Diogenes looked almost angry. "Why did he not try to... why did he not leave?" he demanded. Again Spock noticed how tired the other man seemed. He was taut, edgy, but Spock was guarded, still unsure of Diogenes' intent.

"You will have to ask Jim..." he began.

Diogenes closed his fingers around a small container on the table. "I'm asking you."

There was silence for a moment as the two men faced each other. Spock sensed that Diogenes would not be put off by another evasive reply, yet he was unwilling to reveal what he and Kirk had discussed until he knew what the leader was after. He spoke carefully.

"Perhaps when he thought about it, he decided he didn't want to leave."

"Perhaps?" Diogenes picked up.

"Diogenes, you should be talking with Jim. I don't understand what it is you expect me to tell you," Spock said candidly. The leader released his hold on the container and willed himself to relax. When he spoke, his voice was gentle, questioning.

"Do you feel as he does, Spock? Do you distrust me, also?"

His directness caught Spock unaware. He searched for an answer that would satisfy. "I have observed nothing that would merit that reaction."

"Yet, you are not totally convinced, either." It was a statement and Spock did not reply. Diogenes walked across the room, as though considering. Then he turned and came back to the table. Fatigue seemed to permeate his whole body, yet there was a resigned determination in his eyes and in his voice.

"Spock, I am in charge of nearly a thousand colonists - over that, now, with the new seekers. We have very little resources, very few commodities. This planet which the Federation has given us is harsh and unyielding. But we have a dream and a goal for a better way of co-existence than can be found on any of the other, more luxurious planets in the galaxy. Success depends on the co-operation, the loyalty, the obedience of every man, woman and child here. Often I must do things that may seem unfair, lacking in understanding, even cruel. But it is the only way. I cannot have a thousand people, each with their own ideas, their own methods, their own goals. That kind of situation would pull Goodhope apart in a week, tear down what I've struggled to build. There must be only one will in Goodhope. There can be no tolerance of dissenters or trouble-makers, those who refuse to do their share and break the rules. Our survival depends on it."

"You are a Vulcan. Surely you understand the logic of this method." There was no challenge in Diogenes' face now, only a request for agreement. Spock could, in fact, accept the reasonable content of the man's argument. His own position in Starfleet was dictated by a similar arrangement. Yet, the Science Officer perceived a flaw in the concept.

"A system of government dictated by one man is..."

"Is not the democratic society of the United Federation," Diogenes finished. "True, Spock, but Goodhope is not merely a government body. It is a sanctuary for the lost and hopeless. It gives direction and meaning to life. I have a purpose and a responsibility to give that direction, and the good of the colony becomes the good of the individuals. Those who cannot accept my guidance will not find their place in Goodhope. Those who create dissatisfaction, are destructive not only to themselves but to all of the colony. I cannot allow all to suffer for the wickedness of a dissenter."

"And you believe that you have the right to decide what is best for the colony?" Spock asked. For a moment, Diogenes stiffened and Spock was afraid he had gone too far, that the leader would take offense at his words. Then Diogenes nodded quietly.

"It is the fate of the one who must lead. I will not permit my authority to be opposed. I will not have the vision of Goodhope and its people jeopardized."

Spock seized at the admission. "Then why do you not permit Anton Law to leave, if he is, as you believe, such a dissenter and trouble-maker? Surely that would be more logical than forcing him to remain against his will."

Diogenes shook his head as though Spock had incorrectly interpreted his words. "Anton Law? He is no dissenter, no trouble-maker. He is a mischievous child who has yet to learn. I cannot allow the boy to go off alone in the galaxy. It would grieve his parents. I wasn't referring to Anton Law, Spock."

The Vulcan lifted an eyebrow as the point of Diogenes' words became clear. Jim. Apparently the leader was more than a little troubled by the Captain's actions this morning, but Spock could not determine the intent of his implication. The situation was disturbing and Spock formed his next comment to elicit some clue from the other man.

"What would happen to someone you believed was a dissenter in Goodhope?"

Diogenes smiled. "Colonists come to Goodhope seeking. They look for truth, love, belonging, acceptance. They come because life has been bitter for them elsewhere. No one comes to Goodhope unless there is a need - within themselves. It is known that Goodhope offers nothing in the way of material gain - there is nothing here that is an inducement for ulterior motives. So, if a being is seeking, would we not be remiss in our duties to welcome them, to help them learn the truth they seek?"

Again Spock felt the disturbing talent the man possessed for speaking the truth yet saying very little. It was almost impossible to pin down Diogenes, to attain a direct answer. Still, Spock pressed.

"But if there were a dissenter?"

Diogenes looked sad. "Spock, you and Jim are very precious to me... as all my people are. It would grieve me if you could not learn to accept our ways and find your happiness here with us. There is a need in both of you, but I understand that it is difficult for you to acknowledge it. You are men of the stars; simple ways seem strange to you. I understand Jim's outrage this morning - he was indignant over something he believed was wrong. But he will learn, he will be taught the inaccuracy of his thinking. You will talk to him, tell him that for me."

"Why do you not tell him yourself?" Spock tried to decide if there were a threat in the leader's words.

"You are his friend. He trusts you," Diogenes said simply. Spock chose to push a little farther.

"And what if I, too, am unconvinced?"

Diogenes' eyes darkened. "For your own sakes, I hope that will not exist for long."

"Suppose we should decide to leave Goodhope?"

Diogenes suddenly laughed. "Jim already made that decision. He did not go today." The leader sobered but there was a light in his eyes. "That pleases me, Spock. It tells me that he - and you - still long for what we can give you."

"Perhaps." Spock agreed to placate the suspicions. All at once, Diogenes no longer seemed tired. Rather, he appeared charged, excited.

"It has been a wonderful day, Spock. Come, walk to the Rotunda with me... the message will be inspired. We have new colonists to welcome and you will talk with Jim. I will see him in the morning and tell him what a marvelous job he did on the housing placement of our new members."

Diogenes put an arm around the Vulcan's shoulders and they left the laboratory together.

* * * *

Reassured by Diogenes that Kirk would suffer no harmful ramifications from his actions that morning, Spock joined Kirk at the gathering in the Rotunda. After the message, which was joyful, though less dramatic than the previous, and after supper, the two men returned to their cabin. Both were tired from the long, tense day, but a little later, at Kirk's suggestion, they attended the meeting of their circle group in front of Leander's cabin.

The now-familiar members were already there, joined tonight by three of the newly-arrived seekers. Also, Kirk discovered, his co-worker, Leiis Indestra, was present.

"Jim - I didn't know this was your circle." Leiis smiled timidly at him.

"Yes." Kirk introduced her to Spock. Leiis' smile included him. Just then, Leander came up to them, placing a hand on each man's shoulder.

"Let me introduce you to our newcomers," he invited. Kirk and Spock met Abijane, a middle-aged woman, and a young couple, Che and Dita, nervously holding hands.

It was time to begin. They rested on the ground, hands joined, while KimSoon recited the invocation. The lovely simplicity of the words still impressed Kirk, and he found some of the day's tension draining away.

As they sat up, KimSoon greeted each by name.

"We're especially pleased to have Abijane, Che and Dita with us. Welcome to Goodhope."

Abijane put a hand over her heart, as if to still its pounding. "This is the fulfillment of a dream. I still can't believe it's for real."

Jessica smiled and put an arm around her. "I know exactly how you feel. We *all* do."

"The circle," KimSoon explained, "is our introspection, public and private, to reinforce the teachings of Diogenes. The most important quality is honesty. Peter, perhaps you'd like to share what you've learned about honesty."

Peter seemed startled to be singled out, but he recovered and began. "Honesty is not only what you say to others, but what you say to yourself. I was lying to myself, and I didn't realize it until Diogenes showed me the error of my ways."

"How did he do that?" Kirk asked, intrigued.

"He... he talked with me." Peter pressed trembling fingers to his temples. "It's so easy to tell yourself that something doesn't matter... and it does... it does. Diogenes... seems to know me better than I know myself."

Kirk remained unconvinced. "Sometimes we have to trust our own individual instincts."

"Which is more important - the individual or the whole?" KimSoon's eyes were penetrating, and Kirk sensed the man's disapproval.

"The chain is only as important as its weakest link," Kirk retorted. "Each individual matters."

"Yes... " several murmured.

"You are in accord with us," Leiis noted.

"We can't lose sight of our individuality, or the whole will become bigoted. When we begin to believe that only our way is right, it automatically follows that anyone who thinks differently is wrong, and that's prejudice. Aren't we taught to rejoice in our differences?" Kirk persisted.

The new man, Che, spoke quickly. "No! I'm tired of being different! I came to Goodhope to find a place where that doesn't matter."

"Underneath, we are all the same," Valla told him. "We laugh, we love, we cry, we care. In Goodhope, we concentrate on the common factors, not the differences."

"Jim... " KimSoon returned to focus on Kirk, "do you agree with that?"

"As long as the worth of the individual is not submerged, yes. It's too easy to adopt someone else's values, someone else's beliefs, instead of reaching our own conclusions."

"Must you be in command of every situation?" There was a note of exasperation in Leander's voice. "Don't you believe in trusting others?"

Kirk shrugged. "Yes, I trust others, but ultimately I want the freedom to make my own choices, my own mistakes, if necessary."

"What if those mistakes effect others? What if they bring pain or suffering to another being?" Leiis questioned, curious.

There have been those mistakes, Kirk remembered bitterly. Cautiously, he answered, "I'm only speaking for myself. Sure, it hurts when we make the wrong decision. But hopefully, we grow, we learn from it."

Spock came to his assistance. "Each of you made the conscious decision to come to Goodhope. Therefore you obviously felt in charge of your own particular destiny."

Mialyn nodded eagerly. "I am so grateful that I saw the truth, that I chose to follow Diogenes. And my decision, while it was right for me, badly hurt my parents. They could not understand, could not accept my feeling of alienation from their world."

Dita's eyes widened. "Yes! I came to be with Che, to seek a better world. My family feels I'm making a big mistake."

Che squeezed her shoulders. "Dita's father is an important man in our town, on Altair 3. He wanted Dita to wed her cousin, who also holds a high position. We left our homeworld, yet there was nowhere in the galaxy where we could belong. Everywhere we went, people set us apart, gazed upon us strangely. Our ways are very different, it seems."

"Not here," Peter assured him. "This is your home, now."

Kirk glanced around the circle of beaming faces, reluctant to challenge again, but finding it unavoidable. He and Spock were here to get answers. "But do you all - do we - " he amended, "accept Dita and Che for what they are, or do we expect them to conform?"

"Adherence to rules is necessary in any society," Nars objected.

"We accept everyone for themselves." Leander's words tumbled over the other's.

"Then why are there transgressions - why is there punishment if one does not conform?" Kirk insisted.

"There is no punishment for non-conformity." KimSoon's eyes snapped. "The group must all pull together, certainly, everyone must do their part or Goodhope will suffer. But we do what we must because we want to."

"And if you don't want to, then what? Does anyone ever leave Goodhope?" He knew, from the tapes, that disenchanted believers had left, but Anton had insisted that now, no one left.

Mialyn shuddered. "What a horrible thought. Leave Goodhope? I'd rather die."

"To go back to... the life I left..." Leiis shook her head. "Without Diogenes... without Goodhope... I couldn't. Not now."

"There have been a few who could not adjust," KimSoon admitted. "We still worry about them, still think of them. I sincerely hope they've found... something."

"Spock..." Valla turned toward the Vulcan. "Would you go back to the taunts, the jeers, the discomforts of life as a half-breed, forever set apart by the illogical reason of your genes?"

Kirk saw Spock tense.

"Yes," Peter picked up. "If you could choose between Vulcan and Goodhope, which has treated you most fairly?"

"Every society has its merits..." Spock began. Kirk ached for him, knowing how his friend disliked being put on the spot. He tried to come up with a rejoinder to take the focus away from Spock, but before he could form a thought, Leiis spoke.

"That is unfair, Peter." Her voice was quiet but firm. "A seeker must answer that in the privacy of his own heart. I believe we're getting into a muddle of ideas here tonight." Silently her eyes met Spock's, and there was a tiny smile meant only for him. Kirk flashed her a look of gratitude. Her kindness was warming.

KimSoon sighed. "You're right, Leiis. The important thing is that we should love each other, we should accept all in the unity of Goodhope. Abijane, Che, Dita - we are so pleased you have come to us, you and all the new seekers of truth and justice. We're here, whenever you need, whatever you need. You can go to anyone, any time, for comfort, for solace, for companionship, for anything. We all share in the love and beauty of the teachings of Diogenes."

Leander stood. "Thank you all for coming. May you go in peace."

As always, there was the period of silent embracing. Kirk approached the older woman, Abijane, and it struck him as curious that he and Spock were no longer the 'newcomers'. They were, now, an accepted part of the group. Yet there was an openness which immediately enveloped Abijane and the young couple from Altair 3. By reason of their common acceptance of Diogenes and the ideals of Goodhope, they were instantly part of the bonding, taken in as kindred spirits. One formed an immediate rapport. The warmth of Goodhope flowed through him and he joined in readily, filled with affection for these gentle people.

He turned to Leiis and embraced her, then joined Spock.

"Ready, my friend?"

Valla and Nars fell into step beside them. Nars put a hand on Kirk's shoulder as they walked.

"I'm so glad you're our neighbors," he said warmly, sincerely. "You two are very special."

* * * *

Back at their cabin, Kirk had to transmit a report to the Enterprise before they could retire. He told about the arrival of the new colonists and the mood of excitement which pervaded Goodhope. It was a short, factual report, without personal speculation or comment. When Kirk asked Spock if he had anything to add, the Vulcan declined, deferring to Kirk's judgment of how much was necessary to tell Starfleet. Both men were, admittedly, in a more positive state of mind about Goodhope after the peace and serenity of the circle gathering.

Chapter Seven

Two days later, Kirk and Spock were awakened before the morning alarm by an insistent knock on their cabin door. Climbing down from the loft first, Spock was surprised to find that Bereth was the initiator of the disturbance. He needed the Vulcan at the lab right away. One of the three men who had taken ill at the irrigation ditch had died during the night and Diogenes, having been there, had ordered Dr. Towers to perform an autopsy immediately to determine the precise cause. Spock and Bereth would help in running the tests.

After Spock departed, Kirk dressed, worried by the urgency of the summons and wondering what Diogenes suspected to insist upon such hasty action. Spock had told him that they believed the men were victims of some respiratory infection, but since three in the same area had been affected, it was probable that Diogenes feared an outbreak of some contagious strain.

Spock did not appear at the morning message, which was unusually brief, and though Kirk was not concerned, it was the first one the Vulcan had missed. Afterward, in the dining area, Valla came up to tell him that she was taking breakfast to the lab for Bereth and Spock because Diogenes had felt their task there was important enough to excuse them from the morning's assembly.

Kirk reported to the office. Only Richard Hand and Leiis were there, having arrived just a few minutes earlier. They greeted Kirk and Leiis brought him some reports from the school project to review. Now that the housing construction had been completed, work could begin again on the postponed schoolhouse, but they were lacking some much-needed supplies and Kirk was faced with the problem of where to obtain them. He would have to see what was available in other projects. *Rob Peter to pay Paul*, he reflected, dismayed again at how meager resources were in Goodhope.

He asked for certain files, and Leiis quickly pulled them. Young, potentially attractive given the right clothes, care and proper nourishment, Leiis was efficient and capable in her job. She would have made an excellent yeoman, Kirk observed, and he wondered, not for the first time, what need in her background had brought her to Goodhope. She was a gentle and sweet-natured individual who seemed to radiate peace and happiness. This morning, however, she seemed troubled, and when Kirk questioned her about the cause, her eyes filled.

"It is so sad about Sufo D'Tin," she told him, referring to the man who had died. "He and my good friend, Rhea, were planning to be joined next month. "I was going to stand with them."

Kirk could see the girl was very upset. "Leiis, I'm sorry," he said softly. "Perhaps you should leave, stay with your friend."

Leiis shook her head. "She is much grieved, but Diogenes is with her. He can give more comfort than I. He came to see Sufo often during his illness, and I was there last night when... when it happened. They called our leader and he arrived at once. He has stayed all that time, except to deliver the morning message. Then he returned to Rhea. He is so strong, although I know he feels her pain."

"My friend Spock was summoned to the lab this morning." Kirk wanted to offer some assurance. "They will try to learn why he died."

Leiis nodded. "Two others are also ill from the same malady. Diogenes is concerned..." She bit her lip. "One of them - Danillo Sanchos - and I used to... used to share happy times with Rhea and Sufo."

Kirk was filled with compassion for the girl's grief. "This must be very hard for you."

She smiled a little. "Rhea and Sufo were very much in love. For Dani and I, it was over

some time ago. Still, we are good friends. I hope that Spock will find a way to cure him soon."

Two young couples, Kirk thought, not unlike others throughout the galaxy - making plans, sharing fun. Yet something had driven each of them to follow a man who promised fulfillment of their dreams in Goodhope.

"Did you know each other before you came here?" he asked. Leiis shook her head.

"Each of us came alone. We had each heard Diogenes teach and knew we must be with him. We met here in Goodhope."

"Where are you from, Leiis?" Kirk tried to change the subject, to take her thoughts from her grief. "You're very good at your job. Did you do this kind of work before you came here?"

At first, Kirk thought she would not answer, then she took a breath. "All that I am now, I learned in Goodhope, and from Diogenes. I was... unworthy to live among decent people before I came. I have powers - curses, they are - and I used them in my resentment against those who did not understand. Diogenes taught me that was not the way. He rid me of those evils."

Kirk was intrigued. "What kind of powers?"

"I see people's thoughts. I know what they are thinking. And I can... start fires. I couldn't help it. I didn't know how to control it. It frightened people - even my own mother. She threw me out, so I sold my 'talents' to those who would pay a high enough price - gamblers, traders, anyone who could benefit from knowing what was in another mind. They used me, but I made a good living. I thought I could buy happiness, but I couldn't. There was no one I could be close to. Then I heard Diogenes."

An untrained, undisciplined telepath with pyrotechnic ability... Kirk made a note to tell Spock about her.

"What did Diogenes do?" he asked.

"He brought me to Goodhope. He taught me to purge myself of my will."

"And have you succeeded?"

"Not entirely," Leiis admitted. "It is still difficult not to know what others are thinking. But I am learning. And I am accepted here, I belong. Others do not fear me. Only Dani..."

"Is that why you two..." Kirk began.

"Dani does not understand. Sometimes I would accidentally see his thoughts. He did not like it. But he cared about me, knew it was hard for me to control. He told Diogenes and our leader helped me. He knew that a week in meditation would teach me. It was hard and I was very frightened. I wanted to escape, so they bound me to keep me from running away from myself. Afterward, when I was better, I knew he had been right. I saw the evil in myself and I am learning to bury it."

Kirk felt his stomach knot at the girl's story. "Can you tell what I am thinking, Leiis?"

She smiled warily. "Do you try to tempt me, Jim?"

He returned her smile. "I'll tell you. I'm thinking that you are a very lovely person."

Leiis blushed. "I almost wish I could see if you mean that."

"I do," Kirk said truthfully. "Now, why don't we see what can be done about getting some supplies out to the school?"

* * * *

Kirk and Leiis spent most of the day visiting supply and storage areas and various building sites to see what could be scavanged for use on the school. They were loaded with lists of inventories and available materials, and Leiis kept an accurate account for Kirk's reference.

By mid-afternoon, the girl was showing signs of extreme fatigue and Kirk, knowing she had probably been up all night with her friends, told her to go back to her cabin and get some rest before the evening message. At first she was reluctant, but he insisted, assuring her that he would explain her condition to Diogenes. After they parted, Kirk took all the data they had gathered and headed back to the office to review it.

When he arrived, he found Caldin seated on the porch steps. Their eyes met for a moment, then Kirk began to go past and into the building.

"Don't go in there, Jim," Caldin said. Kirk stopped, a question on his face. "Diogenes is inside. He wants to be alone for a while." Caldin looked away, rubbing his hands over his eyes; he hunched forward on the steps, leaning his elbows on his knees. Kirk hesitated for a second, then moved to sit beside him.

"I have some work to do," he objected. "Is something wrong?"

Caldin did not look up. "Diogenes has been with Rhea all day. He suffers deeply the loss of D'Tin." Kirk noticed the voice was flat, as though he really didn't want to tell anything.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know Diogenes was that close to the man."

Caldin turned to face him, incredulity in his expression. "D'Tin was one of his own. Why would he not mourn his death?"

Just then there was a loud clatter from inside the office. "Oh, damn..." Caldin was on his feet at once and heading for the door. He paused long enough to turn as Kirk began to rise also. "No, you stay here," he insisted.

Kirk pondered his actions for a few minutes while Caldin disappeared inside. Then, making up his mind, he decided to ignore the man's objections and opened the door.

It was dark inside the office, darker even than the first time Kirk had been there. All the shades were drawn completely closed, letting in only thin slivers of light around the edges. Caldin was behind the desk, leaning over the chair in such a manner that Kirk's view of its occupant was mostly obscured. On the floor beside the desk, a large metal pitcher lay on its side, along with a tray, in a puddle of water. Caldin was speaking softly.

"It's all right, Diogenes. You just knocked over the water. I'll clean it up - no harm done." The sound of movement from Kirk brought his head around and he scowled. "I asked you to remain outside," he accused.

Before Kirk had a chance to answer, the chair swung in his direction and Diogenes faced him. Even in the dimness of the room, Kirk saw a Diogenes he had never met before. The crystal clear eyes were dull, puffy, and ringed with red. Beneath, dark circles reached all the way to the cheek bone and the face was furrowed with pain. The stubble of a beard added to the drawn look. Diogenes' white cotton shirt was rumpled and soiled, his long yellow hair tangled and limp and held back from his face by a piece of cloth tied around his forehead. Diogenes was slumped in the chair and his gaze seemed to slowly focus on the man across the room. When he recognized Kirk, he put a hand on Caldin's arm to still his protest.

"Never mind," he told Caldin. Then, to Kirk, "Come in, Jim. Is there something you want?" His voice was sluggish, thick, as though it took a great effort to speak. Kirk felt at once an intruder, but his curiosity over Diogenes' condition kept him from leaving.

"I came back to do some work, but Caldin said you didn't want to be disturbed..." he began. At once he saw Diogenes stiffen as though in pain, saw Caldin's arms go around the man's body and tighten in support. "Are you all right?" Kirk asked abruptly, aware that Diogenes obviously was not.

The leader rested against Caldin and nodded faintly. "I am... fatigued," he managed. "I... need a little... rest..."

"Diogenes, let me help you to the bed," Caldin urged. "You should lie down." No objection came as Caldin began to lift him from the chair. It appeared that he was so weak that he could not stand on his own. Pulling the leader into an upright position, Caldin took his full weight, and Kirk realized that the smaller man would hardly be able to make it to the cot with his burden.

Kirk crossed to them and slipped an arm around Diogenes' waist and drew an arm over his shoulder. He felt the weight of the big man as the leader leaned heavily on him. Kirk and Caldin supported Diogenes between them, half-carrying him to his cot across the room.

As they lowered him to a sitting position on the side of the bed, Diogenes leaned forward, burying his face in his hands, and began to sob almost uncontrollably. Kirk saw Caldin flinch, then turn suddenly and walk away. The devoted aide went to a closet and pulled out a sponge and bucket, and proceeded to mop up the spilled water, working at the task as though it demanded all of his attention.

Kirk watched for a moment, then looked back at Diogenes. He stood awkwardly, not knowing what to do or say while the colony leader seemed to become a victim of the anguish consuming him. The incongruous scene - Caldin cleaning the floor, Diogenes sobbing convulsively - seemed to go on forever, while Kirk stood rooted, the shock of what was happening making it impossible to think beyond the moment.

At length, Diogenes seemed to calm a little. He reached out blindly with one hand and took hold of Kirk's. "I'm... I'm sorry ... you... you had to see this... see me like this... Jim," he apologized, trying to catch his breath, to speak.

Kirk felt the pressure of Diogenes' hand crushing his, perceived the physical strength of this lean, hard-muscled leader, and although he had been startled by the sudden, violent display, Kirk understood, too, the grief caused by losing someone entrusted to your leadership.

Diogenes lifted his head to face Kirk, and the agony welled up in his eyes. It was difficult to witness, and Kirk felt himself wanting to pull away. He understood now why Caldin had begun mopping the floor so intently - he had probably been through this before and it hurt to watch the unsuccessful struggle to suppress the pain.

"He was so young..." Diogenes' voice was almost a plea. "And Rhea... they were planning to be joined. She carries his child..."

Caldin came over and sat beside him on the bed. He had wet a cloth and he wiped his leader's face with it. "You will take care of her. You assured her of that," he reasoned.

"I'm not worried about her. She will accept in time. She's young. She will even learn to love again..." Diogenes still gripped Kirk's hand. "Jim... can you understand a little of what I feel, what it is to lose someone for whom you feel a responsibility... someone who has trusted you, followed you?"

Kirk found his voice at last. "Yes," he said quietly. "I can understand."

"It is like losing a part of myself, yet more than that, for it is a tragedy I could not prevent, a sorrow for which I can offer no real solace. I am... I am defenseless against the enemy Death which claimed his life and emerged the victor." His words were bitter, expressing frustration.

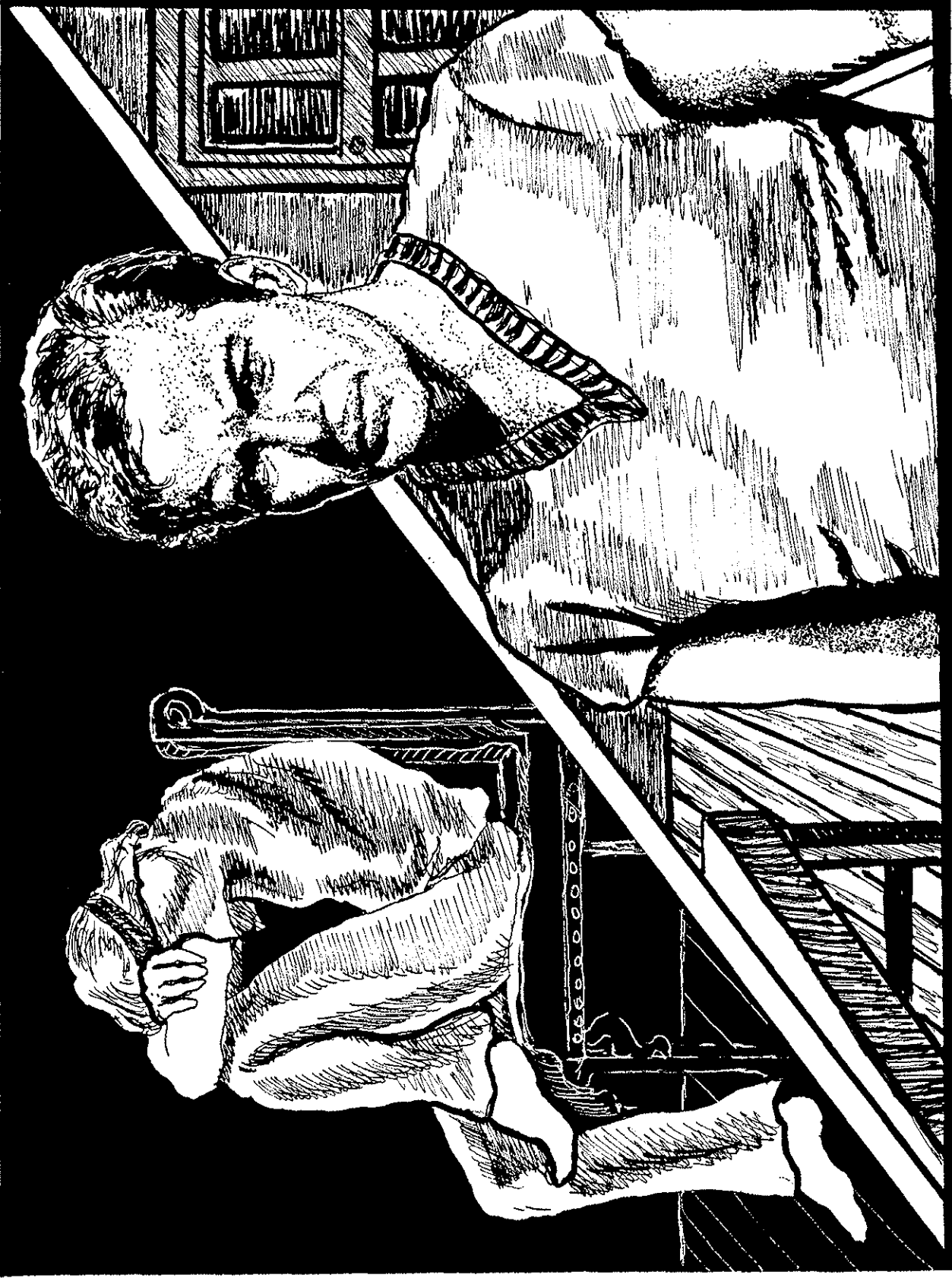
"Death shows no mercy... and no discrimination." Kirk found his own voice matched the bitterness of the leader. Diogenes looked up sharply at him.

"I do not like to be beaten this way. What is mine, I keep," he warned suddenly. Then he released Kirk's hand and leaned back against the wall, closing his eyes. Caldin touched his shoulder.

"Diogenes, you must get some sleep."

The big man opened his eyes and canted toward Caldin, resting his head on his shoulder and embracing him. "Caldin, what would I do without you, my beloved? You take such good care of me." His eyes were brimming as he turned his head slightly to face Kirk. "He worries about me so much. He is my comfort and my anchor." Caldin looked embarrassed, and Kirk avoided his eyes.

"Perhaps you should do as he suggests," he told Diogenes. "You've had an exhausting experience." The leader looked close to collapse and Kirk wanted very much to leave the office, yet Diogenes seemed reluctant to have him go.



"In all the galaxy, I have been most fortunate to have found Caldin... to have found all my children who have come to Goodhope. There is so much they need, so much I must give them. I... I wish I could be more... could end their sorrows... "

"You give more than any man," Caldin cut in. Diogenes smiled, his eyes still on Kirk.

"Do you believe that, too, Jim?"

Kirk took a breath. "I believe this is not the time to discuss it," he countered. "Caldin is right, you're tired."

Diogenes pulled away from his aide and sat up abruptly, frowning, his eyes flashing. "Caldin is right! Caldin is right!" he mocked. "Do you think me weak because I grieve? Do you think me soft because I weep?" His voice was accusing.

"I didn't say that." Kirk was confused by the man's sudden shift of mood.

"Don't ever make that mistake," Diogenes warned. "Caldin is what I allow him to be. It is my strength which sustains us all!"

Kirk started to turn. "I'd better go," he decided, not wanting to pursue the conversation when Diogenes was obviously in an unstable frame of mind.

"You will leave when I tell you!" Diogenes stood, fury in his eyes. Kirk hesitated a moment, gauging the man's condition. Caldin was on his feet too, reaching for the leader.

"Diogenes, please... "

Diogenes whirled, swinging his arm back and catching Caldin across the mouth with his hand. "Leave me alone!" he shouted. Caldin's lip began to bleed as he tottered backward, trying to retain his balance. Kirk stepped forward, grabbing Diogenes' arm to prevent him from doing any more. He met with no resistance. Diogenes' eyes were on Caldin, his face stricken. As Caldin recovered, the leader sagged, realizing what he had done.

"Oh, Caldin... " he breathed. "I'm... I'm sorry... "

Kirk released his grip, deciding that Diogenes was not going to do any more violence. The leader glanced at him gratefully, then moved toward his aide.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it," he implored. Caldin wiped the blood from his mouth and shuddered in an effort to control his anger. He glared at Diogenes but did not answer. The leader turned to Kirk.

"Do you see? Do you see what grief can do? Witness my agony, feel my suffering, and then ask yourself what I am."

Diogenes dropped to his knees and began to sob quietly, murmuring to himself. "I've hurt him. I'm not myself... I didn't mean it... "

Caldin and Kirk exchanged glances over the kneeling man, then Caldin dropped beside him and put his arms around Diogenes' shoulders.

"It's all right, Diogenes. I'm not hurt." His voice was resigned. Then he addressed Kirk. "I think you should leave, Jim. I'll take care of him." Caldin's tone was authoritative, almost possessive, and Kirk was aware that the man resented his presence.

"Are you certain you'll be all right?" Kirk wanted to know.

"We will *both* be all right," Caldin said emphatically.

"Take care of me," Diogenes was pleading. "Help me, Caldin... "

"Yes, my Teacher," Caldin assured. "I will help you."

Kirk was dismissed, forgotten. He waited a moment, then headed for the door, the soft, silent

sounds of the two men's voices still in his ears.

Outside, the hot, bright sunlight assailed his senses and Kirk squinted against the glare. He was as disturbed as he could ever remember being. Diogenes was one of the most enigmatic individuals he had ever encountered, and Kirk knew himself to be too emotionally charged to think dispassionately at the moment. Later, when he had gained some time and distance, he would try to reason out the experience he had just witnessed.

As he headed down the path toward his cabin, however, Kirk knew that he was not going to be able to turn his thoughts from what he had just seen. The whole incident and its physical impact was still affecting him, causing him to tremble, throwing his mind into a maelstrom of impressions and reactions.

Part of him was impatient for the cool, soothing objectivity of Spock's clear-thinking presence, and he felt the urge to rush to the Vulcan, recount the events and accept his friend's rational analysis. The other part of him rejected that idea, for unless he himself could present the facts clearly, Spock's interpretation was apt to be incorrect. Kirk considered that he would have to detach himself from what he was feeling in order to understand what had happened, and yet, by his own admission, he had many times relied on just such feelings to guide his decisions.

Diogenes was obviously a man of volatile moods - cresting on peaks, plunged into valleys, and teetering on precipices. He was as difficult to anticipate as the shifting, changing currents of space. His actions and reactions at any given time were unpredictable and astonishing, yet Kirk could perceive an underlying dedication with which he could identify. The question, Kirk knew, however, was to what Diogenes was dedicated. He didn't know if the man were a savior or a savior. Did he believe what he taught, or was he playing the biggest con game in the galaxy?

In the weeks that he had been there, Kirk admitted that he believed the basic concept of Goodhope was noble. Yet he could have drawn that same conclusion from reading any of the taped materials about Diogenes' teachings. To build a place where prejudice and bigotry did not exist, to revere honesty and truth and justice above all things, to extol the virtues of individual worth and acceptance - these were things sought by beings all over the galaxy, goals aimed for by all men of integrity. Perhaps some of Diogenes' methods seemed extreme, but the ultimate destination was high and the struggle to achieve it was difficult.

Still, there were inconsistencies in the man himself. His attitude toward Anton Law and his reaction to the death of Sufo D'Tin were not congruent with each other. The reports that had filtered back to the Federation had spoken of mistreatment, and Kirk had reluctantly observed a few things that could support that accusation. Yet the people in Goodhope seemed devoted. Kirk pondered whether they were being brainwashed into submission, and knew he had no concrete evidence to support that theory. Most disturbing of all, Kirk realized, was his own indecision, his own inability to formulate a satisfactory conclusion. He could not detach himself from the fate of the colonists and remain an impartial observer. He felt their hopes, fears, even if he could not believe in Diogenes... That thought made him pause. Did he really not believe in Diogenes?

Kirk had been furious with him over the Anton Law incident, and angry, too, as he had read between the lines of Leii's story of her sweetheart's betrayal and Diogenes' subsequent method of 'teaching' her. He had almost decided that the man was a tyrant with a streak of cruelty - and in fact he knew that still might be true. He had been totally unprepared for the vulnerability he had just seen demonstrated. He had not expected Diogenes' capable of so much empathy for the people, he had not judged the depths of commitment the man felt, and he was not at all certain that the leader had been sincere. On the contrary, no one could have shared his anguish and not have believed in it.

Diogenes had issued a challenge in his distraught state. He had said, 'Witness my agony, feel my suffering, and then ask yourself what I am.' Kirk shivered in the blazing heat and knew he was far from having the answer.

He had reached the cabin. Spock was not yet home from the lab, he discovered. Kirk knew that Spock was having no more success than he in deciphering the complex personality of Diogenes. The Vulcan, too, was troubled by the situation in Goodhope, and that knowledge was not reassuring to Kirk.

Glancing at the chronometer, Kirk discovered he had two hours before the evening message.

He crossed to the couch and sat down. Automatically, he reached inside his shirt and took out the transmitter. After ten minutes of staring at it, unable to begin, he gave up and put it away.

It would be interesting to see Diogenes condition at the gathering, he reflected. Yet, even as he speculated, he knew instinctively that Diogenes would be recovered, in control of the assembly and himself, and only Kirk and Caldin would really know what he had gone through this afternoon.

There was no time to talk of the incident when Spock arrived home shortly before the time for the message. As Kirk had predicted, Diogenes delivered a moving lecture and gave no indication that he had been consumed with grief.

Later, in the privacy of their cabin, Kirk questioned Spock about what he had learned concerning D'Tin's death.

"Doctor Towers is convinced that it was a respiratory infection of the viral variety, similar to pneumonia. He's ordered an antibiotic to treat the other men who are affected, but it seems that Bereth was over-reacting this morning to a crisis that does not exist," Spock told him.

"Is that your opinion, also?" Kirk asked.

Spock shrugged. "Actually, I was not able to form much of an opinion. When I arrived at the lab, Dr. Towers was handling the autopsy and his wife was conducting the tests. Apparently Diogenes was rather distraught when he called Dr. Towers to D'Tin's deathbed, and ordered all scientific personnel to duty to discover the cause. As I said, it was an emotional over-reaction on everyone's part. Dr. and Mrs. Towers finished the autopsy, prepared the reports, then they went to the infirmary for their regular duties. Bereth and I spent the day working on another project entirely."

"But you weren't at the morning message," Kirk observed.

There was a twinkle in Spock's eye. "A matter of having a semi-valid excuse to miss it," he confided. Kirk understood.

"Well, I can believe that Diogenes was distraught at the time of D'Tin's death. He was still very upset when I saw him at the office later in the afternoon." Kirk described his encounter with the colony leader and Caldin.

Spock was thoughtful, listening as Kirk related the details of the experience. When the Captain had concluded his narrative, Spock was quiet for a few moments. Finally, he spoke.

"It seems Diogenes is a man of many surprises."

"Does it surprise you, too, that he reacted in that manner?" Kirk asked.

The Vulcan considered. "Human behavior is often unpredictable to me," he admitted. "Yet there are certain characteristics which one learns to expect after close association with, and continued observation of, your race. It seems, however, that I may have been incorrect in my judgment of this man."

Kirk had to smile at Spock's admission, but he was more than a little interested in the motivation that prompted it. "In what way?"

Spock, who had been seated on the couch, rose and crossed to the table where Kirk sat,

"Diogenes teaches adherence to the concept of the good of the whole, sublimation of individual will. He advocates himself as supreme leader, demands absolute obedience to his word. He tolerates no breach of devotion to his law. For him to be so affected by the loss of one life..." Spock trailed off.

"You don't believe the two are compatible?" Kirk voiced his own doubts. Spock gazed deeply at his commanding officer, as though suddenly making a comparison.

"It is a side of him I had not considered," he answered at last.

Kirk discerned the Vulcan's thoughts. "He does indeed have some interesting similarities," he agreed.

"Jim, Diogenes is not at all like you - not in the ways that count," Spock amended wryly. "I did not mean to imply that. I was merely observing that you are both men who are responsible for the lives and welfare of many, and it is a responsibility that you both accept, although your methods of dispersing that duty are quite different. Yours is an authority delegated by Starfleet and you, too, must answer to superiors. Diogenes' authority comes from himself. He answers to no one and that could be a very dangerous position for any man."

"Absolute power corrupts absolutely... is that what you're saying, Mr. Spock? Our system of checks and balances keeps us starship captains from becoming little tin gods?"

Spock missed the edge of sarcasm in Kirk's tone. "I am speaking in generalities, Jim. It has been a long standing fact that this is precisely the danger."

Kirk found himself annoyed with Spock's analytical statements. "Well, it's a good thing I have you and Bones to keep me in line, or I might become a dictator on the Enterprise," he snapped, and at once was irritated at his own reaction. Intellectually he knew Spock meant nothing personal, that the Vulcan was in his own imperturbable manner simply gathering facts, forming an hypothesis. Yet perhaps the disturbing train of conversation was traveling too close to the same doubts and introspections he had avoided facing. Perhaps the fear that he *could* see much of Diogenes in himself and much of himself in Diogenes was one of the most disturbing aspects of his association with the colony leader.

Spock caught the exasperation in Kirk's voice and failed to understand it at first, then realized how his clinical appraisal of the subject must sound to his friend. He was contrite, frustrated at his own insensitivity.

"You are a unique individual," he said quietly, hoping to correct his thoughtlessness, to reassure his Captain of his respect. "You have a special kind of compassion that makes you more than worthy..." There was a lump in his throat that constricted his speech. He looked away, reluctant to continue voicing what he felt. Kirk was touched by his friend's discomfort and sorry that he had been the cause of it. He had not doubted Spock's loyalty, had not intended to force him to admit it.

"And now you discover that Diogenes also exhibits a compassion for the individual," Kirk remarked, steering the conversation back to a less personal ground. "He's a man of his own authority, and yet he's concerned, he feels for each of his followers."

Spock nodded. "It *is* a rare combination."

"One that is worthy of respect," Kirk agreed.

"One that is worthy of another approach, at least," Spock qualified.

Kirk considered. "Spock, if Diogenes does possess the quality of compassion, if he is as self-sacrificing, as dedicated to his own teachings and goals as his followers believe, he could be one of the greatest leaders history has ever known."

"Yes, he could be a dynamic force for good."

"Wouldn't it be something if, from these humble beginnings, we were to find..."

Spock understood his musing. "I, too, find myself... hoping... that we will discover that Diogenes is all that his followers believe,"

Kirk smiled. "Hoping, Spock? Isn't that an emotional reaction?"

The Vulcan sighed. "Jim, the people of Goodhope are from all over the Federation. They have suffered as a result of others who felt themselves superior. They have suffered through no fault of their own. Yet in spite of that, they have managed to care about others, to labor to achieve a sense of dignity. They have learned not to retaliate against prejudice with prejudice.

They have sacrificed personal gain for personal peace. There is much to be said for Goodhope... and for the man who has made it possible. It would be disastrous to lose it all, to discover that it is all a lie."

"Disastrous for the colonists," Kirk commented.

"Yes."

"And what if we must be the ones who discover that it is a lie... that Diogenes is not a saint?" Kirk asked quietly. Spock sat down across from his friend and steepled his fingers.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, "it would also be a disaster for us."

Kirk didn't answer, but his mind whirled with thoughts of Leiis and D'Tin, of Caldin and Diogenes, and of Anton Law.

Chapter Eight

It was several days after the arrival of the new colonists before Kirk and Spock noticed Anton Law again seated with his parents during the evening message.

Wherever he had been, he looked healthy enough now, and the perpetual scowl was still in place. His mother sat close to him, her hand resting on his arm. Kirk noted that Diogenes made no mention of his return, just as no mention had been made of his absence.

Determined to pursue the questions with which he had struggled for days, Kirk made up his mind to talk with Anton. When the assembly gathered to eat, Kirk whispered his intent to Spock.

"It might be better if I approach him alone. You sit over there with Valla and Nars - I'm going to find the Laws."

Spock nodded and Kirk carried his plate away, searching along the tables for his quarry. He finally spied the family and gave a sigh of relief as he noticed that they were alone at one end of a table. He sat down opposite Anton.

The boy did not look up from his plate, but Mrs. Law smiled warmly at him.

"Good evening," she greeted.

Jory Law looked uncomfortable. He picked at his food without seeming to taste it. Kirk had the impression that his arrival had interrupted something.

"Evening, Mrs. Law... Anton. I'm pleased to see you back with us tonight."

He looked up then and, recognizing Kirk, he frowned darkly. "What is it to you?"

"Anton!" His mother's tone was sharply reproofing.

"Are you all right?" Kirk ignored the boy's belligerence.

"I... learned my lesson," Anton evaded, quickly returning his attention to the food.

Jory Law looked curiously at Kirk. "Excuse me, my friend, have we met?"

"Not directly, Mr. Law. I'm Jim Kirk. I met your son a few days ago..." Kirk began.

"And you were also concerned enough to speak with me when Jory was taken away for meditation," Mrs. Law injected. "Just what is your interest in my family, Jim Kirk?"

"Are we not taught to care for each other?" Kirk replied easily. "It seems your family has had its share of burdens lately."

"He is right, Beca. It is the word of Diogenes. We must never question concern or caring." Jory turned to Kirk. "You are right, friend. We have been severely tested, but we are fine now, aren't we Anton?"

"Surely, Father." Anton didn't look up, and the words were spoken without enthusiasm.

"Tell him, Anton," Jory prompted. "Tell him how Diogenes demonstrated his goodness, his mercy to you, tell him how he counseled you to repent, and how you have put your trust in him once again."

"It was an inevitable conclusion, wasn't it?" Anton's hard eyes met Kirk's. "One cannot escape the *truth*."

Jory seemed satisfied, unaware of the double meaning of his son's words. Beca stood and gathered the empty plates of her husband and son.

"My husband, we must not tarry. Our circle meets tonight."

The elder Laws stood by the table. Anton eyed them warily. "I'll stay down here for awhile."

"All right, son. Be home before curfew..." his mother began.

"I *know*," Anton grated.

Kirk watched the interplay, trying to determine the emotions at work. Beca Law was seemingly in control, the most forceful member of the family, and also the most secure. Jory was nervous, at times fearful... 'cowed' was the most apt term, Kirk decided. Anton was the biggest puzzle. He seemed to be making an effort to suppress his hostility, but it was still there, waiting to erupt. Why, in this place of goodness and peace, was Anton Law so out of step?

As his parents departed, Anton stood to leave also.

"Wait a minute," Kirk entreated. "Can we talk for just a moment?"

"About what?" Anton was cautious.

"The other night. I... saw what they did to you."

"And?" He was not making it easy for Kirk.

"Where have you been since then?"

"I told you. Learning my lesson. It is *wrong* to want to leave Goodhope. Goodhope is my *home*. I *belong* in Goodhope. Praise be to Diogenes." Anton said the words bitterly, as if daring Kirk to say more.

"Jim..." Spock came toward them. He stopped when he saw Anton poised for flight.

"Sit down, Anton," Kirk urged, beckoning Spock to his side. "Look, you made some pretty wild charges the other night, and Spock and I have been concerned about what you said. We'd like to make Goodhope our permanent home, but if there's anything going on, we want to know about it... before it's too late."

Anton chuckled mirthlessly. "You're here, aren't you? It's already too late. Diogenes will never let you leave. Never."

Kirk felt a chill at the certainty in the boy's voice. Gently, he asked again, "What did they do to you, Anton?"

"Keep asking questions like that - you'll find out, first-hand. Even now, you're watched. Or perhaps it's me they're watching. But by tomorrow, Diogenes will know you talked with me. Don't look now, but over to your right, two tables away... the man is Xervia, one of Diogenes' agents."

"Are you not allowed to speak with anyone?" Spock asked, puzzled.

"Not privately like this. They don't want me stirring up trouble. Well," Anton sighed, "I don't care. I'm tired of hiding. There are others who feel as I do. We'll organize. We'll..." He broke off abruptly, as if realizing what he was saying and to whom.

"What others?" Spock asked.

"Excuse me. I really must go, before we all get in trouble. Good evening." Anton pasted a smile on his face and left quickly, before Kirk or Spock could stop him.

They were silent a moment, then Spock said, "He seems... almost irrational."

"Or the only sane man in a world of irrational people," Kirk countered, thoughtful.

* * * *

Kirk tried to dismiss his preoccupation with Anton Law and his family. It was unfair, as he told Spock later that evening, to discount all the good they had seen and heard about in the colony, merely on the word of one spoiled adolescent. He was beginning to think that perhaps they were trying too hard to come up with something negative.

Yet something continued to plague him - something that did not seem right. A seed of doubt had been planted by Caldin and his men out at the landing field, by Diogenes' almost casual dismissal and evasion.

The next evening, Kirk arrived at the Rotunda before Spock. The Vulcan arrived bare seconds before Diogenes himself. He was even quieter than usual and he continued to seem troubled about something through dinner.

It was not until they were alone in their cabin that he spoke of it.

"Jim, what was your opinion of Dr. Gordon Towers?" he asked thoughtfully.

Kirk grimaced. "Well, he's not Leonard McCoy."

"I am not interested in his personality," Spock responded curtly. "What was your evaluation of his skill?"

Kirk's brow knitted in sudden concern. "I repeat, he's not Bones. Spock... is there some... specific reason you're asking? Are you feeling ill?" He worded it carefully, aware of Spock's sensitivity about his own health.

Spock raised an eyebrow in surprise, then his expression softened. "No, Jim, I'm fine." He took a seat at the table. "Sit down. I'll explain."

"Yes," Kirk urged, taking the other chair. "You seem to have made a mess of this conversation so far," he observed.

"Strange," Spock noted, "how I find myself lapsing into Human speech patterns on this assignment. Perhaps it is the pretense..."

Kirk grinned at the unintentional insult. "Anyway, what about the doctor?"

"Jim, this must remain confidential, for I was asked to tell no one. I only ignore that request because of my duty to you and to the Federation..."

"Yes, Mr. Spock." Kirk wondered how long Spock had worked on the equation to justify his telling, and found himself slightly annoyed that Spock had needed justification.

"You remember Sufo D'Tin's death a few days ago? Dr. Towers diagnosed the case as a respiratory infection and later stated that the autopsy confirmed his diagnosis. You will recall that when I was summoned to the lab, Bereth and I were not actually involved at all. Dr. Towers and his wife handled the whole investigation. They had been treating him with an antibiotic which was apparently ineffective. I learned today that three other colonists have the same symptoms, and Diogenes suspects that the initial diagnosis may have been in error."

"What is it, then?"

Spock shook his head. "Unknown at present. This morning, Caldin briefed Bereth and I on what little is known. Later, we talked with Towers and his wife, Elci. The woman was the one to report the similarities in the four cases. We've been asked to co-operate fully on isolating the bacteria and finding a pharmaceutical solution."

"Is it contagious?" Kirk grasped the need for urgency and secrecy.

"Again, we have no confirmation. There is a connection - all four men worked on the same irrigation project. Tomorrow we'll take blood samples from the rest of that crew."

"If it *is* the beginning of an epidemic..." Kirk paused. "Spock, the colony's not equipped to handle it!" The Vulcan nodded, averting his gaze.

"I know." Kirk caught the worrisome note of sadness in his friend's voice.

"Our next scheduled report to Starfleet is not expected for several days," Kirk reminded. "In your opinion, should we apprise them of these developments now?"

Spock looked up sharply. "Negative. Jim, it's too soon to offer any conclusions or theories. I advise waiting. We'll know more in a few days. There is no need to involve Starfleet at this time."

Kirk frowned, considering. "You'll be working on the experiments. You'll keep me posted on the progress of the research?"

"Of course."

"All right - I agree. We'll wait until we know more." Kirk stood up. "Let's go down to the clearing before someone starts wondering where we are."

* * * *

The next morning, Spock was up and dressed long before the early alarm sounded. He climbed back up to the loft and touched the shoulder of his sleeping companion.

"Jim..."

Kirk opened his eyes at the sound and Spock waited until he focused and a question formed in those eyes. "Spock? What is it? Is something wrong? I didn't hear the alarm," Kirk said sleep fading as he noticed the fully-clothed Vulcan.

"It has not sounded yet. I'm sorry to disturb your sleep, but I wanted you to know I was going to the lab early so you would not be concerned about my absence when you awoke later."

Kirk sat up and rubbed his eyes. "What time is it? I feel like I've just gone to bed."

"You have four hours before the alarm will sound. There is no need for you to rise. Go back to sleep. I merely wanted to let you know of my whereabouts."

"Four hours?" Kirk was incredulous. "Spock, have you slept at all?"

"Unnecessary at this time, Jim, and since I am already awake, I deemed I could make use of the time at the lab."

"It's the middle of the night," Kirk protested. "I don't like you going out, working like this. You need rest, too, and don't give me any platitudes about Vulcan metabolism."

Spock seemed to smile. "Captain, on the Enterprise I have often worked all night, many times under your orders, to find a cure for a disease, or the solution to a critical problem."

"But you weren't under the pressure that you are here..." Kirk caught the look of disbelief and realized the absurdity of his words. "Well, I still don't like it," he finished lamely. Spock seemed to expect more. "Go ahead," Kirk said at last, "but whatever you do, be careful."

"I will see you at the Rotunda for the morning message." Spock climbed down the ladder and Kirk heard the door open and close. He lay back down, but knew he would be unable to fall asleep.

Damn... he thought, not certain if he were annoyed at Spock for going out or for waking him from his sleep, or if it were because he was worried about his friend.

Spock had not seemed himself earlier last evening when they had discussed the possibility of an epidemic. Kirk knew the Vulcan well enough to detect the slight alteration in his manner. His reluctance to call Starfleet had bothered Kirk, and while the Captain agreed that they could wait, there had been something about Spock's attitude that did not seem quite right. He knew Spock was concerned about the elusive illness, knew that as a scientist Spock was curious, compelled to find the answers. As a compassionate being, he was compelled to find a cure. Yet it was disturbing to find that Spock had been unable to sleep, that he felt driven to return to the lab in the middle of the night to work. *Disturbing... yet reassuring*, Kirk thought fondly, for it was, in fact, just like the Vulcan to exhibit this kind of dedication.

Yet even as he tried to accept that reassurance, Kirk could not dismiss the nagging fear for his friend. Goodhope was tearing at Spock, chipping away little chunks of his protective shell.

I understand what he's going through, better than he realizes. Kirk had seen the subtle indications of tension, moments when Spock had been caught off-guard by some sudden display of emotion. He had witnessed the doubt when Spock had been faced with direct self-examination, caught the confusion when the Vulcan had been confronted by a logic that was contrary to his beliefs.

It's taken a long time for Spock to have achieved the dignity and confidence his position on the Enterprise has given him, Kirk worried. *It's taken a long time for him to be as open with me as he is, to relate to others and accept his dual heritage.* Kirk was suddenly frightened. *How secure was Spock, really?*

Kirk had felt the pressures of Goodhope, had experienced moments of indecision, too. They would not believe totally in Diogenes' philosophy, would not be moved to blindly follow his teaching, yielding their will to his. Yet he did not know how long they could be exposed to his influence without being effected by it. How deep would those effects go, what direction would they take?

Kirk cared about the people of Goodhope and knew that in spite of himself, Spock did, too. His determination to find a cure for the epidemic was more than a humanitarian concern for an afflicted society or a scientific challenge. His unwillingness to involve Starfleet was more than a desire to wait for clearer information. His reluctance to confirm a theory about Diogenes went deeper than a search for conclusive evidence.

He's protecting them, Kirk realized, and the thought made him feel cold. *He wants to believe in Goodhope.* Unhappily, Kirk knew the intensity of Spock's devotion, knew the fierce loyalty of which he was capable - to the ship, to his Vulcan heritage, to his Captain. If Spock were now moved to divide that loyalty, to include Goodhope - or Diogenes - the resultant confusion could destroy him.

Kirk got out of bed, unable to lie there any longer. He climbed down the ladder and crossed to the table, turning on the lamp. Then he poured a drink of water - his mouth suddenly dry. Checking the chronometer, he found it was still three hours until dawn.

Oh, shit, he thought. *Am I blowing this all out of proportion because it's a long sleepless night? Or is it my own indecision about this place that's causing it? One way or another, Spock, we've got to hold on, but God, I wish you were here right now.*

Kirk paced the small windowless room for awhile, impatient for the morning. Briefly, he

considered going to the lab to see Spock, then rejected the idea. What Spock didn't need now was the worry over Kirk's worry over him.

Finally he laid down on the couch and, physical need overcoming his restless thoughts, he drifted into an uneasy sleep. When he woke, the alarm bell was sounding and Kirk realized he had almost overslept. He dressed quickly, briefly touching the transmitter to see that it was securely in place. As usual, he had a full schedule planned that would leave him little time for personal concerns. Perhaps by evening Spock would have more information about the illness and they could send a transmission to the ship. Kirk resolved he would have a talk with Spock and then decide how serious their situation was becoming. Resigned, he left the cabin to face one more day at Goodhope.

* * * *

Spock arrived for the evening message wearing a loose-fitting green coverall and an expression of annoyance. Over dinner, he explained to Kirk that he and Bereth had been sent to the cabins of the sick men to collect blood samples for analysis. Upon returning, Caldin had ordered them to shower and change into the coveralls, and had sent their contaminated clothing to be burned. It was a standard procedure when dealing with an unknown infection, and Spock berated himself for not having anticipated it.

"Did they discover the transmitter?" Kirk wanted to know, dismayed that the Vulcan had allowed his device to be lost.

"Negative," Spock responded. "The men handling the detail were too anxious to rid themselves of the garments."

"Well, we still have the other," Kirk assured, trying not to emphasize his concern. It would help neither of them if Spock felt guilty about it, yet Kirk knew it was not like the Vulcan to have made such a careless move and not have done something to try to prevent it. "When we get back to the cabin, I'll secure mine in a safer hiding place."

Spock nodded morosely.

"Hey, c'mon - it's not your fault. How were the sick men?"

"We can talk of it later," Spock evaded, conscious of the others in the clearing. Then he added, "I must return to the lab for a short while after dinner. There are several timed tests which I must complete."

Kirk was disappointed. He had felt they really needed to talk. "Spock, you've been working there since last night. Is it necessary that you drive yourself so hard over this?"

The Vulcan sought a way to explain. "Jim, until we find a cure, more people could die. Right now, we do not have a critical situation here in Goodhope. I am trying to prevent one and haste is imperative."

Kirk glanced around to be sure that no one was paying any attention, then he lowered his voice. "What about the facilities on the ship? Wouldn't they aid your research tremendously?"

Spock looked almost wistful. "Indeed, they would be most beneficial," he whispered. "But, Jim, you and I both know we will jeopardize our mission here if we involve Starfleet now."

Kirk was not convinced. "Is the success of the mission as important as saving lives?"

"I do not believe we must make that choice - yet," Spock answered. Kirk was thoughtful, wondering whether Spock's reasoning was coming from a purely logical approach, or if he perhaps was being influenced by some of that protective tendency Kirk suspected. Finally, Kirk sighed. He had never doubted his friend's judgment before.

"All right. I'll see you back at the cabin later." They rose and Spock hurried toward the laboratory.

With time to kill, Kirk decided to take a walk. Soon, he found himself on the road which led out to the new schoolhouse project. The evening was still and quiet as dusk deepened the

sky from blue to a glorious purple and gray. The path sloped upward and when Kirk paused to rest he realized the spectacular view to be enjoyed from this vantage point. He could see all of Goodhope, laid out in neat rows of buildings. One could trace the progress of the colony as the original hub expanded and stretched outward.

Up close, there was really nothing attractive about Goodhope. The buildings were small, crudely and cheaply constructed. The ground was rocky and arid. The only vegetation was that grown in the fields by the colonists. Yet from up here in the twilight hour between day and night, Goodhope had a certain primitive charm. Kirk watched as lanterns began to glow around the area, twinkling from the clearing and the fronts of scattered cabins where he knew circle groups were sitting down to begin their positive introspections.

Away from the center of activity, he tried to detach himself from the myriad of feelings Goodhope evoked and tried to gain a new perspective on the place. On the practical side, the settlement seemed to have little chance of succeeding, its goals of maintaining a growing, viable community doomed to failure.

Kirk had observed enough to admit that the colony had massive problems, perhaps unsolvable problems. It had grown too big too fast, and still more people flocked to Goodhope. The land was too harsh to support a self-sustaining colony, despite what Diogenes told his people. Supplies were desperately low. Facilities were stretched to accomodate more than they were designed for. Being a non-selective colony, the ratio of occupational skills was all wrong. Goodhope needed doctors, engineers, scientists - and they got miners, laborers and office workers.

Kirk had seen it happen to other colonies. Most didn't survive a decade. 'Everybody is welcome' was not a sound administrative policy, regardless of the nobility of the thought. If, as Spock seemed to suspect, there was an epidemic beginning in Goodhope, the colony had no resources with which to combat it. They would be forced to accept outside help, no matter how much Diogenes might loathe the idea. At least this time, there was a starship nearby... what would happen the next time?

His troubled thoughts seemed to revolve in endless, dissatisfying circles. Kirk stood up from his rocky perch and decided he could accomplish nothing more in repose. Quietly, he headed back down.

He had reached the outmost cabins when he suddenly heard voices; angry, fearful sounds, foreign to Goodhope. Pausing, he strained to hear what was being said,

"It will take more than three!" came a heavy, guttural voice.

"We can get others... there are many who... "

"Anton, you dream," interrupted the third, identifying the only voice Kirk recognized. "There's no opportunity to form any kind of resistance."

"And if we're caught... " the first man began.

"Harry, Dack, this is just the beginning. We must be brave. We must... " Anton broke off. "What was that?" Kirk, too, had heard the sound, which drew Anton's attention. And while Anton may not have recognized it, Kirk did. It was the rapid clicking of a phaser dial being set.

Kirk shifted his position to gain a better vantage point. As he stepped carefully to the right, he saw the silhouettes of the three men - or, he corrected his initial impression, two young boys and a man. They were behind the last cabin, against an overhanging rock ledge which had been excavated to make room for housing. The intruding sound had come from above them, and Kirk peered into the darkness to make out the forms.

"Anton Law - you others - come out of there!" The voice echoed through the deserted area. It was Caldin, Kirk realized.

The older rebel stepped bravely forward, although Anton tried to restrain him.

"Caldin? Where are you? What's the matter?" the man asked innocently.

Kirk watched as Caldin stepped to the edge. "Up here, Harry Amos. What is your business down there?"

"Just sharing a few stories with the boys, Caldin. Nothing to -- "

"Liar! You plot against Diogenes." Caldin raised a hand and gestured. Four of the men with him moved to his side.

"No! It's not -- " Harry protested, his guttural voice quaking now.

"Seize him! Take him to Diogenes," Caldin ordered. Then, "Come out, Anton. We know what you're trying to do."

There was a flurry of activity as the four guards clambered down the slope and took Harry and the boy named Dack between them. Neither resisted, although both were clearly frightened.

"Please... please... " Dack began to sob. "Please, I'm sorry. It was all Anton's idea! He told me..."

Caldin, with two other men, had joined the group and he put a hand on the trembling boy's shoulder. "Dack, be at ease. Diogenes will understand. You know he will do only what is best for you."

"Please... will you tell him? Will you..."

"Yes, Dack. Go with Xervia. You will feel better to have your transgressions out in the open, to cleanse yourself of them."

Dack and Harry moved off with the four guards. Caldin and the other two faced Anton Law.

"I'm not going back there with you," Anton cried. "You're not going to beat me again..."

"Anton, don't be ridiculous. You're the one causing trouble - now, you take others along with you in your folly," Caldin grated. "Diogenes has been more than patient with you, he's given you every chance to learn your lesson."

"Why won't you just leave me alone?" Anton pleaded, backing away against the stone wall behind him.

"You've disrupted your family, now you seek to disrupt this colony. Anton, this time you're going to learn your lesson. This time you've gone too far. You'll never change." Caldin's voice was sad.

"You're going to kill me!" Kirk saw terror in the boy's face. He cowered like a caged animal. "You are! I know you are! Oh, please... please don't take me back to Diogenes!"

"Anton, you're irrational. Listen to yourself. You hear only what you want to hear."

"I hear the whip hitting my back! I've felt its sting for the last time, Caldin. I won't suffer any more! I can't!"

"No... no one must suffer in Goodhope," Caldin soothed, edging toward him carefully. "Come on, Anton. Think of your parents, of what this might do to them..."

"You rotten animal! Don't you dare hurt them again - don't threaten me with their safety..." Anton pushed at Caldin in a sudden, unexpected feint calculated to squeeze past him. Caldin lunged for him and knocked him to the ground. The other two guards moved into action, pinning Anton firmly and roughly.

There was a quality of reality to the boy's terror. He was acting irrationally, but it was a madness born of desperation and fear. Kirk's stomach tightened apprehensively. He could not stand by and see them take Anton away again.

This time, Spock was not there to put a restraining hand on his arm. Kirk calculated the distance, picked up a rock and hurled it into the middle of the melee, hoping to catch them

unaware and give Anton a chance to escape.

All four reacted to the flying missile with stunned surprise, but Caldin was the first to recover.

"Who's out there?" he shouted into the darkness. Then he turned to the others. "Go take a look. I'll stay with him," he ordered, indicating Anton Law's supine form.

The two men took a few tentative steps in the direction from which the rock had been thrown. Kirk crouched deeper into the shadow, undecided whether to maintain his dubious cover or make a run for it. If they came any closer, they would surely spot him. The two men approached, their eyes searching carefully. Finally, counting on the darkness and the element of surprise, Kirk made his move, taking off in a crouching run. It was a tactical error.

"There he is!" he heard a voice behind him shout. "Come back here!"

Almost instantly they were upon him, pulling him roughly around. Furious, Kirk straightened and shrugged their hands off.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

Caldin came toward them, dragging the resisting Anton with him. In his hand, Kirk saw the glint of the phaser whose sound he had detected earlier.

"Jim Kirk?" Caldin's voice was puzzled, suspicious. "Why are you here?"

"Let Anton go, Caldin." Kirk's tone was hard. "What is he so afraid of?"

"Jim, you're interfering in something you know nothing about -- " Caldin began.

"I know that weapons are supposed to be forbidden in Goodhope," Kirk countered. "Is Diogenes aware that you have that?" He eyed the phaser pointedly.

Caldin frowned. "I don't know what you're doing out here, but I think perhaps you'd better explain to Diogenes."

"Yes, I have a few questions I'd -- " Kirk began. One of the guards jabbed him in the ribs.

"Silence! The wicked must be purged... you have brought trouble upon yourself."

The other man pushed at Kirk to propel him forward. In self-defense, Kirk turned on them, reacting instinctively.

He had delivered only two quick, well-placed blows when he heard the high-pitched whine of phaser activation. A jolt like a current of electricity engulfed his body and he collapsed, swathed in blackness.

Chapter Nine

Consciousness returned gradually and with it the heavy, leaden feeling which always accompanied a phaser stun. Kirk knew from experience that it would be a good twenty-four hours before his body returned to normal, before his nerves stopped twitching and his co-ordination was up to standard level.

Slowly, he sat up and tried to figure out where he was. The total darkness confused him. He could make out the walls, but nothing more.

The punishment shed... ? He shivered as a tremor coursed through him, an aftershock of the stun.

A scraping sound drew his attention and a slice of moonlight accompanied the opening of the door. Caldin entered, followed by one of the men who had been with him earlier, and last, Diogenes himself.

Kirk unsteadily gained his feet and confronted the leader with a cold glare. "What's going on?" he demanded. "This has gone far enough!"

Diogenes approached him as Caldin and the other lit lanterns in the shed. Kirk blinked in the sudden brightness and took his attention from the leader long enough to determine that this must, indeed, be the punishment shed. The cursory glance showed the interior to be empty except for a few storage crates and a closet.

"Jim... " Diogenes' voice was ominous. "You have been accused of transgressing against Goodhope. This is a serious charge."

Kirk glared at him, his anger growing. "If there are any transgressions, ask him - " he flung a hand toward Caldin. "He had a phaser - he used it. Is this the peace of Goodhope? Armed guards who intimidate and frighten young men like Anton Law?"

Diogenes' eyes blazed. "You had no right to interfere. Your obsession with the Law family has been evident since your arrival. I asked you to trust me to do what was best for Anton, for Goodhope, but you could not do that."

"I could not stay back and do nothing while I watched a young boy being victimized, brutally handled. The odds were just a little out of balance. Interfere? You're damn right, because nowhere in the galaxy could this be considered justice."

"In Goodhope, I am the justice. I am the authority. I decide who will be punished and how." There was no gentleness in Diogenes' voice now, no sign of the compassionate teacher.

"Then they *were* acting under your orders. You knew about the phaser and you authorized them to use it to capture Anton."

Caldin moved to the leader's side. "This one has been nothing but trouble, Diogenes. He needs to be taught a lasting lesson that will take some of the spirit out of him."

Kirk's eyes darted to the three men in the shed and he gauged his chances. His head was reeling from the phaser stun and his limbs felt like lead. Diogenes put a hand on Caldin's arm.

"He will be taught, Caldin." The leader watched Kirk. "You dare to question my authority, to make accusations, to interfere with my teachings. Goodhope exists because of me. You must learn obedience, exorcise that fearsome ego and pride in yourself, and comply with life here. It is for your own good."

"That's how you see it," Kirk shot back. He was disgusted by the man's attitude, and while he was not really surprised by it, he felt a surge of disappointment. The compassionate manner, the noble words, the promises and platitudes he preached covered the core of a cruel and vicious dictator. Kirk found a fury behind the leader's eyes that no high-sounding excuses could conceal and the confrontation was more disquieting than the situation in which he was now trapped. He let the bitterness creep into his voice.

"You teach us to care for each other. You talk of love and brotherhood and peace, yet my actions tonight are condemned. Why? Because what you say is only true as long as it doesn't cross purposes with what you want?"

"I do not like to punish anyone." Diogenes' voice was resigned. "But the whole is greater than its individual parts. Order must be maintained at all costs."

"Yes, I've heard about your punishment. Is that what Anton was so afraid of? Tell me, what have you done with him? Where is Anton?"

"Thanks to you, he managed to escape. He will not go far. When his belly is empty, he'll be grateful to return."

"And then he'll be punished?" Kirk pressed. Something in Diogenes' manner seemed wrong. Suddenly, Kirk recalled Anton's charge that he would be killed. "Or, have you already taken care of that?"

Diogenes grew furious. "That's enough! Do not compound your error!"

"Why are you so afraid of one disobedient boy? Is your authority so fragile that it's threatened by dissension?"

"Silence. Caldin - Mordi - secure him to the post. We will not discuss Anton Law."

Kirk struggled with the two men, but they pulled him across the floor and fastened his hands around one of the wooden pillars. He twisted to see Diogenes, who moved close to him, his face filling Kirk's blurred vision.

"It is your *own* actions which must be examined. *You* are the one challenging the authority of Goodhope, and it is *your* faults which bring me to this terrible duty." Diogenes shuddered and expelled a long breath. "This is your first offense. Learn your lesson tonight, Jim, and it will never be repeated. The choice is yours."

"You take away that choice - " Kirk charged, seeing Mordi remove a whip from the closet. "Using violence and physical brutality is no way to retain command - "

"Give him twenty lashes, Mordi." Diogenes turned away, but not before Kirk glimpsed the startling sight of tears in his eyes.

Helpless, Kirk set his jaw, determined, aware that there would be no mercy from this man who was suddenly a stranger. He tensed as Mordi moved into position and the whip descended.

* * * *

Spock paced the confines of his cabin, debating whether he should attempt another venture to Diogenes' office. For the hundredth time he damned the illogic of a structure without windows. All the formidable Vulcan strength was primed for action, yet there was no release from his frustration, not even the ability to peer outside.

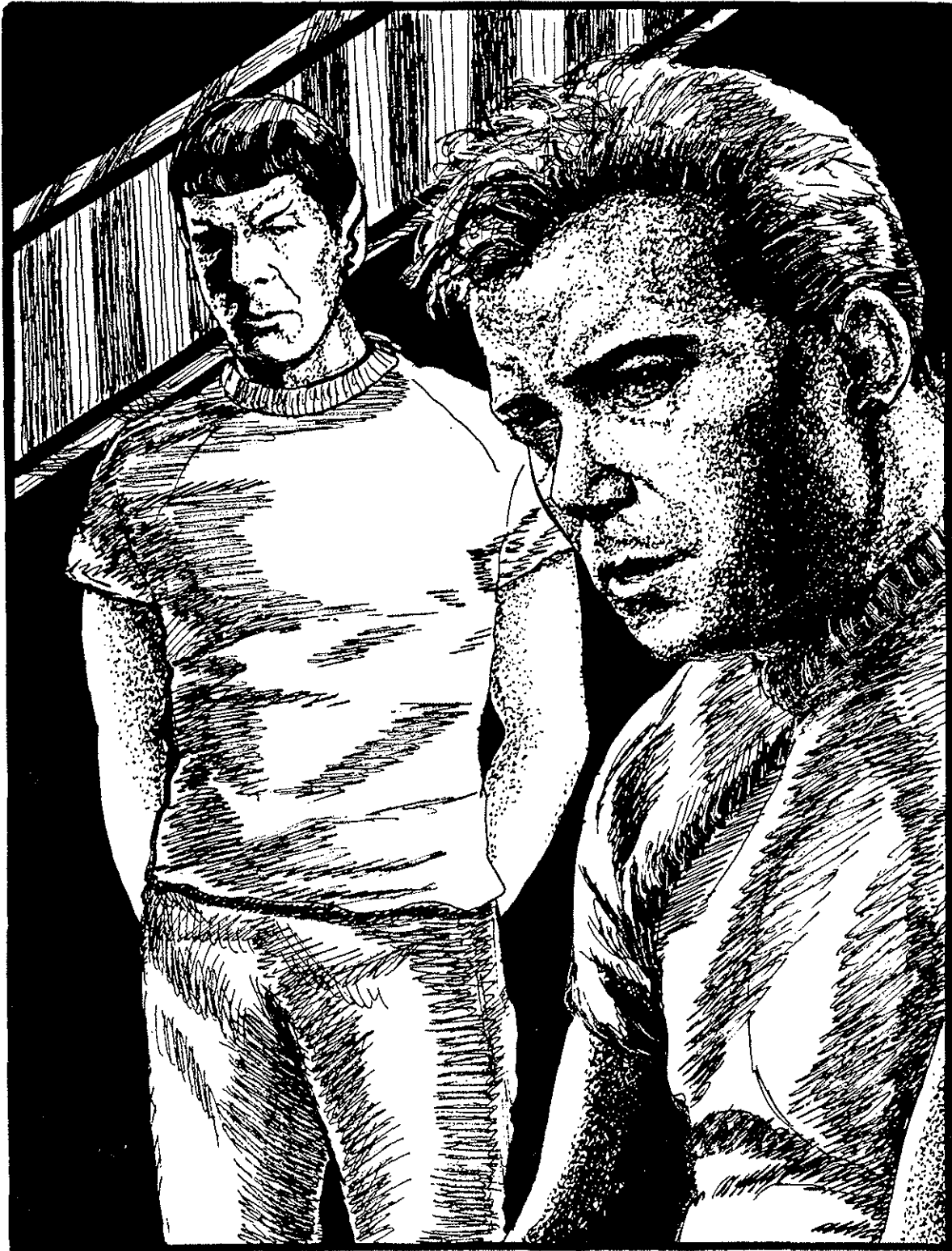
It had been nearly curfew before he had finished his work at the lab and returned home. Discovering that Kirk wasn't there, he had doubled back to the clearing. A prolonged search failed to disclose Kirk's whereabouts. The colony grew quiet, but Spock had paid no attention to the curfew. Finally, he was approached by one of the monitors and advised to go home. When Spock explained the situation, the man, Lerin, had seemed concerned and promised that he would see what he could find out. Reluctantly, Spock had returned to the empty cabin. A short while later, Lerin had knocked on the door and told Spock that Jim Kirk was in private conference with Diogenes. When Spock had pressed for details, Lerin would say no more.

He had waited what seemed a reasonable length of time, then he had walked over to Diogenes' office. The building was locked and apparently deserted. Spock prowled around the colony, until another monitor challenged his reason for being out, then he had returned to the cabin, his mind troubled with questions.

For what purpose would Kirk be with Diogenes half the night? Spock didn't know if his Captain were in trouble or whether Kirk had gone to Diogenes for some reason of his own. Perhaps he had learned something and was confronting the leader, perhaps they were working. It did not appear that they were at the office. Where, then? Spock considered all possibilities, his apprehension growing with each passing minute. He tried to reason logically and knew it was impossible where Kirk was concerned. He understood that it was not necessary for him to be apprised of his Captain's every movement, yet he also knew the other man's habits, and it was not like Kirk to stay away so long without leaving him some kind of message.

Spock continued to pace when suddenly, he heard sounds outside the cabin - footsteps, a voice. Crossing the room in quick strides, he threw open the door just as the latch was being pulled back. Kirk tumbled against him, thrown off-balance by the action.

As Spock caught him, breaking his fall, he saw Caldin move away from the cabin. Stunned, he looked down at the trembling figure in his arms and stared in confusion.



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"Jim... what happened?"

Kirk tried to steady himself, to explain. "... beaten... my back..." he managed.

Spock turned him around, still supporting his weight, and lifted his bloodied shirt. Kirk's back was covered with lashmarks. Spock grimaced at the sight.

Dizziness and nausea threatened to overcome Kirk. He clung desperately to the Vulcan's arms. Giving up, he allowed the tremors to consume him as Spock lifted him up and carried him across the room.

"... and... phaser stunned..." he finally managed to finish, as Spock gently deposited him, stomach-down, on the couch.

"Lie still... easy," Spock cautioned, sitting beside him and carefully removing the soiled shirt. He was desperate for answers, but knew Kirk's physical needs came first. Appalled by the beating his friend had received, Spock could not think past the moment. "I'll get something to clean your back..."

Kirk's fingers dug into his thigh as he moved to stand. "Spock..." Kirk tried to relax, to flow with the tremors, but the pain was too great. "... wait... a minute... please..."

The Vulcan swallowed, trying to still his own trembling, to control the agitation he felt for the other's suffering. He reached down and took Kirk's hand in his, projecting reassurance as much for his own sake as for his friend's.

"No... I'm here." He felt the pressure of his hand returned, watched as Kirk bit his lip and squeezed his eyes shut in an effort to suppress a groan.

In a few moments, Kirk began to breathe fast, taking in gulps of air as the seizure began to abate. He opened his eyes and managed a small grateful smile at Spock. He could not maintain it. The smile faded and he closed his eyes again. A shudder washed over him as the recollection of the evening's experience flooded through his mind. It was over for now, but his thinking was still muddled, his thoughts still chaotic. He was back with Spock, but the disillusionment and pain of the punishment shed was still with him. Spock would have to know, too, and Kirk sensed what that knowledge might do to the Vulcan.

As Spock felt Kirk begin to relax slightly, his questions returned, demanding answers. "Jim, what happened? Who did this?" he asked again.

It seemed like such a long, formidable story to Kirk. Quietly, he said only, "Diogenes."

The answer was the one which Spock had suspected yet refused to consider. He was silent for a moment, then he asked, "Why?"

Kirk winced at the dismal tone of Spock's voice. "The standard... punishment for... disobedience..."

Dismay was replaced by anger, fury at the injustice, rage at the betrayal of an ideal. Spock could only take refuge against the unsettling emotions by action. He went to get a cloth and a basin of water.

When he returned, Kirk was lying on his side, one arm thrown across his eyes. Spock sat down and faced him. Kirk stirred and moved his arm, and Spock saw the raw pain in his eyes, understanding that it was only partly physical.

"Here - let me tend your injuries," Spock soothed, pulling Kirk toward him and back onto his stomach.

"Spock... do you... understand?" Kirk implored. "The reports were right - Diogenes is insane and evil."

The Vulcan dabbed at the smears of partially-dried blood, unconsciously holding his breath. "Yes..." he managed, his tone weary.

Kirk silently damned Spock's unresponsiveness. He felt as if Spock had put a wall up between them or was somehow retreating away from him.

"Do you feel well enough to tell me all that happened?" Spock asked.

Kirk began to outline the events of the night, in halting tones noting everything he had seen and heard. Spock finished his ministrations and helped him to sit up, and still Kirk talked on, his head beginning to clear at last. When he was finally through, Spock was silent. Kirk studied him, trying to decipher the expression. Slowly, Spock shook his head.

"I'm... sorry, Jim. If I hadn't been so involved at the lab... I should have been with you."

"Why? So we could both have been in trouble? Hardly, Mr. Spock." He shivered involuntarily and wrapped his arms around himself.

Spock frowned. "This changes everything. Jim... I suggest that we abort the mission at once."

Kirk considered. "Perhaps. We've learned what we came here to find out."

"Indeed, we have," Spock replied tautly. "There is a danger here which I do not believe we can handle alone. Jim, call the ship," he urged.

Kirk could almost hear the unspoken plea. Spock, he realized, was more deeply affected than he was. Spock, personally, needed to get away from here, to put Goodhope and Diogenes behind him.

"All right." His torn tunic was lying across the arm of the sofa where Spock had put it. He tried to reach for it, but Spock anticipated his movement and handed it to him. Kirk fumbled in the seam for the transmitter, but he could not locate it.

"Here - let me do it," Spock offered, taking the shirt from Kirk's unsteady hands. Kirk watched as Spock carefully examined every seam.

"It's gone... "

"It can't be!" Kirk exclaimed.

"Was your shirt removed? Did they take it from you?"

"Yes, right before they beat me, but... Spock, if they'd found a transmitting device in my clothing, I would have been questioned... suspected..." Kirk trailed off, confused.

"Could it have fallen out?"

"No," Kirk responded more sharply than he intended. "It was fastened securely."

"Then how do you account for its disappearance?"

"I don't... know. Oh, damn..." Kirk moaned, as the spasmodic trembling began again.

"You must go to bed now," Spock told him. "You've had no sleep."

Kirk glanced meaningfully at the fully-clothed Vulcan. "What about you? How much rest have you had, Mr. Spock?"

"That is inconsequential. I do not have the same sleep requirements as you." He stood. "Come."

Kirk's shivering increased. He tried to stand and found himself off-balance. He *was* tired, he admitted. Tired and sore and probably still not thinking too clearly.

Spock perceived his friend's disorientation and weakness, and silently grieved over it. Gently, he guided Kirk toward the loft, his supportive arms taking the bulk of Kirk's weight. "Rest, Jim," he soothed, as he settled Kirk under his blankets.

Although it was nearly time for the gathering in the Rotunda, Spock made no move to leave,

He lowered himself down beside Kirk, intent upon keeping vigil over the injured man. Weakly, Kirk reached up and touched his arm.

"Spock, what are you doing? It's time for you to be at the meeting."

"I will stay with you this morning."

Kirk shook his head. "No... I want you to go there. Diogenes will notice your absence... We... we have to continue to appear... to appear true seekers. There's no point in causing him to wonder... about us. I want us to continue as we are until we can determine a way to reach the ship."

"I do not wish to leave you like this."

Kirk's eyes softened. "Spock, please... "

Spock struggled, torn. Then he nodded. "After the morning message, I'll return with your breakfast."

Satisfied, Kirk felt his eyelids growing heavy. "See if you can... find out anything about ... Anton. Ask his parents, maybe... "

"Yes, Jim," Spock placated, frustrated by his Captain's preoccupation. "You are certain you will be all right?"

"What else can go wrong?" Kirk grimaced. "No - don't answer that."

Spock touched his shoulder briefly in reassurance, then climbed down the ladder. Dismal, he left the cabin.

Chapter Ten

Kirk slept lightly despite his fatigue. When the door to the cabin opened and closed, he was immediately awake. He sat up and peered down at the floor below.

"Spock?"

"Here, Jim." The Vulcan's voice was flat and weary. He moved into Kirk's line of vision and began to ascend the ladder. With joy, Kirk saw the plate of food he was carrying.

"Mnn... breakfast," he said enthusiastically. "Thank you, Mr. Spock."

"I'm sorry I was gone so long. Diogenes spoke for a particularly long time this morning." Spock handed the plate to Kirk and helped him into a comfortable position. He seemed preoccupied, almost disturbed about something. Kirk eyed him carefully.

"Shouldn't you be in the lab?"

"Yes." Spock sat across from him. "Eat your breakfast and then we must talk."

"About what?" Kirk did not touch the food.

"Perhaps you'd better eat first," Spock advised.

Kirk considered. It must be important; the way Spock was acting, it had to be. He rested the plate on the floor beside him. Quietly, he asked, "What did you find out?"

Spock hesitated, then answered directly. "Jim, Anton Law is dead."

Kirk reacted with surprise then agony as the words became irrefutable. "Oh, God... no. How?"

"Diogenes spoke of it this morning. They found his ... body out near the schoolhouse project. It was an accident. Apparently he fell through some unfinished flooring into the foundation and fractured his skull. Nieron had gone out to set up for today's work crew... "

"It was no... accident," Kirk blurted. "He was killed."

"We have no proof of that," Spock cautioned. "You told me that Anton was highly agitated last night, acting irrationally. He may not have known what he was doing when he got away from Caldin... "

Kirk buried his head on his arms, his knees clutched up to his chest. "I can't believe that, Spock... and you're right. We'll never prove otherwise. Damn... "

"If Diogenes purposely had him killed... " Spock hesitated.

Kirk looked up. "Yes, Spock?"

"Then what we are dealing with is... "

"Murder," Kirk finished bitterly. "After last night, I believe Diogenes is capable of it. I don't know how Anton died, but he had something to do with it, either directly or indirectly. The boy was afraid for his life." He glanced at the plate of food and found he was no longer hungry. A burning anger raced through him and he felt the sting of unshed tears.

"Something else," Spock continued. "I spoke with Bereth in the clearing. One of the sick workers from the irrigation project, Sanchos, is worse. He is not expected to survive the day."

Kirk remembered Leiis' affection for the young Danillo Sanchos. She would suffer at his death. He thought of Jory and Beca Law, and knew they would be distraught over losing their only son. They seemed to be surrounded by grief and loss. With a determined effort, Kirk began to rise.

"I'd better go over to the office. Perhaps I can... "

Alarmed, Spock put a restraining hand on his arm. "Jim, you're in no condition to go anywhere. Please, you need to rest. It will do no one any good if you collapse."

The motion made Kirk sharply aware of the quivering in his legs, the soreness in his back. Realizing the truth of Spock's warning, he sank back against the pillow.

"Damn," he swore at his own physical weakness. "Damn Diogenes." He drew a breath, deciding. "All right, Spock. I'll stay put for now. But we have to help these people. You go on over to the lab. Find out what's happening with the disease, what progress is being made on a cure, and if there are any more colonists infected. Then report back to me. If this thing spreads, Diogenes will have to call Starfleet for help."

Spock looked skeptical. "You will remain here until I return?"

"Yes, Spock." Kirk's voice was resigned. "Now go on, get out. I'll be all right."

Reluctantly, Spock forced himself to leave the cabin and go to the lab, consciously suppressing the anger he felt, the desire for retribution against the man who had done this to Kirk. It would help neither of them to destroy their cover and reveal themselves at this time, and they were still bound to try to complete their mission. Also, he had to admit that they were in a very untenable position now that the transmitters were gone. Although they still had the transponders, those elusive devices did not offer the same sense of security as actually talking to the ship.

His thoughts tumbled about, trying to make order out of confusion. He had seen with his own eyes the results of Diogenes' treatment, yet earlier, in the Rotunda, he had watched and listened

to the leader and had been filled with ambivalence. This was a man who taught a philosophy of brotherhood, whose gentle, commanding nature had captured Spock's respect. This was also the man who now had Kirk's bloodstains on his hands. They had discovered another side to his personality, one that was repulsive and frightening - Diogenes, the dictator.

History was full of such men. Yet, where did one draw the line between reformer and egomaniac? In his day, many had called Surak a dictator, an iconoclast, Spock reflected. Surak, however, had never used physical abuse. It was that method of control which pushed Diogenes from one category to the other.

At the lab, Spock found a note from Bereth instructing him to go to the infirmary. There, Spock found a scene of bedlam, with colonists filling the small building. He located Bereth in one of the examination cubicles, where he was drawing a blood sample from a female patient. Impatiently, the young man took Spock aside.

"Where have you been?" he whispered fiercely. "Look at this mess! At least twenty of them are complaining of the D'Tin symptoms."

Spock mentally calculated that at least half, with a probable two-thirds of them would be authentic victims of the unknown and so far fatal malady. His mind nearly refused to accept the data. For that many to succumb meant only one thing... epidemic.

"I shall begin immediately," Spock responded automatically, ignoring Bereth's question.

"Elci Towers will give you a list of names," Bereth told him. "Diogenes was looking for you, too."

"Well," Spock bristled, "the leader must wait. This is of primary importance."

Bereth eyed him strangely, but said nothing.

They collected the lab samples in several hours and returned to their bio-comp. Shortly after they had begun the analysis, Diogenes strode into the laboratory.

"Spock - I'd like a word with you please."

The Vulcan looked up from the hood of his viewer, tensing at the sound of the familiar voice. He sought to keep his expression neutral as he met the eyes of the leader. The two men regarded each other for a moment and Spock was aware of a hesitancy in the other. Diogenes covered the flaw with an authoritative tone.

"Did you not receive my message that I wanted to see you?"

Spock's gaze remained stern. "I received it. However, my presence here was more essential."

As he took a seat on the stool opposite Spock, Diogenes nodded. "Yes, Bereth has told me how invaluable you have been in the medical studies. He asserts that you have more knowledge than anyone here."

Spock ignored the unsolicited praise and made himself concentrate on the problem of the epidemic. "Yes," he admitted truthfully. "However, my proficiency is not enough. We are dealing with an unknown infectious agent. Given enough time - which we may not have - we *may* come up with a causative. Once the cause is isolated, further study *may* produce the proper antitoxin."

"You don't sound very hopeful. Do I sense that you are deliberately pessimistic?"

Spock's dark eyes blazed angrily for a moment. "Diogenes, we have no proper equipment, and little manpower. I deal in facts, not miracles."

The leader leaned across the table and lowered his voice intently. "Facts are often misleading... unless one is in possession of all of them."

"I am a scientist. It is always my practice to obtain as much data as possible before venturing a conclusion."

Diogenes seemed to consider. "Of course. I would have expected no less of you."

"Just what is it, may I ask," Spock's voice was almost conversational, "that you do expect of me?"

"Your loyalty, your dedication to Goodhope and your task. Your honesty."

"And may I expect those things in return from our leader?" He spoke the title with contempt. Diogenes stiffened, his expression harsh.

"Do you question my loyalty, my dedication... "

"Your honesty?" Spock interrupted. Once again, Spock detected a controlled rage that was masked by a gentle voice.

"I know of no occasion in which I have been dishonest with you."

Spock was weary of fencing with the man who had so brutally ordered Kirk's punishment, weary of the innocent facade which cloaked a potential tyrant.

"Why did you have Jim beaten?"

"So that's it. I thought it was. You are upset because your friend had to be taught a lesson."

"Taught a lesson?" Spock demanded. "What lesson can be taught by physical abuse to one who is unable to defend himself?"

Diogenes ignored the question, his voice sympathetic. "Spock, I can understand your reaction, and I grieve with you. That's why I wanted to see you, to explain, to reassure you of my feelings. Even now, while we face a possible crisis for Goodhope, while the need for haste in finding a cure to this sickness is so important, I realize the necessity of your peace of mind. That you have misunderstood my motives is of primary concern to me."

The Vulcan refused to be placated. "What is there to misunderstand? You had him whipped unmercifully, while he was stunned and bound. He is in the cabin now, unable to function normally as a result of your actions. What explanation can you offer that will change that?"

"Nothing can change it. I am truly sorry about that." Diogenes rubbed a hand over his eyes. "Yes, I had him beaten, Spock, and I know he suffers for it. It is a fact. But remember I told you that facts were misleading unless you know all of them." Diogenes paused. When Spock didn't reply, he went on. "Spock, I have said that I understand your feelings about it. As a scientist, give me the same chance to explain mine. Before you draw a conclusion, let me present the facts as I know them."

"For four years, I have fought for the survival of Goodhope - fought with every strength, every breath I own. I have fought, struggled, sacrificed, because I believe every individual who comes here deserves the dignity of self-respect. Respect, Spock, not pride or willfulness which are destructive in other societies. And self-respect must begin with respect for others. It is a lesson which is often difficult to learn."

"Your friend is a proud and willful man. His pride, his refusal to yield his will, is destructive to himself and, more importantly, could be a threat to Goodhope. I cannot allow that threat to exist, any more than I can allow the threat of this epidemic to go unchecked."

Spock was unconvinced, still seething at the leader's attempt to gloss over the incident. "You speak of one man as a threat. There is no comparison between that and the epidemic we face."

"Each man, woman and child is important to Goodhope. You are important, for without your knowledge and skill, our chances against the sickness would be lessened. Jim is important. His interference with Caldin and Anton Law allowed the boy to escape, gave him a chance to flee the safety of the colony. Now Anton is dead, his parents are desolate..."

Spock's eyes blazed. "You dare to lay the blame for Anton's death on Jim!"

"No," Diogenes denied, drawing back from the Vulcan's fury. "No, Jim could not have predicted the tragic outcome, but Spock, can't you see how his disregard for my instructions has contributed to this terrible result? If Caldin had been allowed to return Anton to me, the lad would be alive and with his family today."

Diogenes' reasoning was not without merit, and Spock had to pause to accept the possibility. Almost at once, he remembered Kirk's bitter words, his belief that somehow Diogenes had been responsible for Anton Law's death.

"I do not see the logic in your conclusion," Spock said with slightly less conviction than before. "Anton Law was afraid he would be beaten again, as indeed my cap... my friend was."

Sadly, Diogenes shook his head. "A beating is a terrible experience. I realize that. I feel each whiplash as though it were cutting into my own flesh. But it is not fatal. It leaves the victim hurting, perhaps angry, fearful, but *alive*. Alive, Spock! Yes, I would beat Anton to save his life, to prevent his destruction, just as I would inflict this kind of humiliation on Jim to rid him of his self-destructive tendencies. I fight for the lives - for the souls - of all my followers, whether it be with a whip or an unrelenting search for a medical cure. If I must issue punishment, though it tears me apart personally, I will do it with every ounce of courage I can find, to achieve survival for each of you. Dare you judge me, unless you are willing to sacrifice as much for a thousand individuals!" Diogenes glared at Spock, challenging the Vulcan to disbelieve him. There was a desperate kind of sincerity in his words that confounded Spock. He was convinced that the leader was not quite sane, yet he had no means at his disposal to determine the direction of his aberration. That Diogenes was dangerous, he was certain, yet the man's dedication to his goal was unquestionable. Spock now knew the violence of which the man was capable, yet he knew of no way to prevent it at this time.

He found the revelation more disturbing than his Vulcan heritage would have allowed him to admit. There was no satisfaction in the knowledge that Diogenes was not all that his followers believed. Quickly, he decided that Kirk had been right. They must continue to co-operate, to seem to accept Diogenes' teachings, until they could reach the Enterprise. Reluctantly, Spock lowered his eyes.

"I will process these samples. Perhaps we will find a miracle after all."

As he stood, Diogenes smiled. "Perhaps you will. Goodhope is made of miracles."

Before Spock could answer, Caldin burst through the door. "Diogenes - quickly! It's Sanchos... Dr. Towers says he's dying, and he's asking for you."

The leader's face seemed to crumble. He glanced at Spock. "Find that miracle, Spock. Find it soon." Hastily, he left the lab.

Shaken by the encounter, Spock sat back down and fingered a slide absently. Bereth, who had unobtrusively found himself a corner when Diogenes had begun talking to Spock, now crossed the room and glanced uneasily at the Vulcan.

"Spock...? I have no desire to meddle, but... "

"Then keep your counsel, Bereth. We have work to do," Spock said tightly.

Bereth looked chagrined. "Please, listen. Whatever Diogenes has done, know that it was done out of love. He works so hard for all of us, and he cares so much... "

Spock was freshly aghast at the total loyalty of the man. He honestly believed, had been taught to believe, that Diogenes was right, regardless of what he said or did. Devotion to that degree could be extremely dangerous to any individual. Spock knew Bereth was only one of many in Goodhope who felt that way. The colonists idolized Diogenes, worshipped him in an unhealthy way.

I had almost begun to be convinced of his goodness myself, Spock realized. Perhaps not to the extent of the others, but it was there. If enough time had passed, if events had been different ... now, all that has changed.

Spock clasped his hands together to keep them from trembling, his distress obvious. He rose

from the table and headed for the door, needing to escape the confines of the lab. He would seek a spot to be alone until he could clamp his Vulcan discipline over his mind and body, until he could put his chaotic thoughts in order. He felt Bereth watching him.

"Spock?" the young scientist called as he passed. "Spock, are you all right?"

Without speaking, Spock stepped outside and turned away from the lab, away from the hub of the colony. He walked toward the barren, rocky cliffs on the outskirts of Goodhope, cliffs not so different from the deserts of Vulcan.

* * * *

By the time Spock returned to the cabin that afternoon, he had managed to obtain control over his reactions, although the sight of his Captain's injuries again threatened to override his precarious balance. Kirk had been glad to see him and anxious for news of the research's progress. Spock had waited until he had examined the injuries and applied salve to the lacerations before he spoke of his encounter with Diogenes and the situation at the hospital. It was obvious to both men that Goodhope needed outside help, but the loss of their transmitters posed a real problem of how to request assistance.

Goodhope had a communications station, they knew, located on the second story of Diogenes' office, in the leader's private quarters. Kirk had often wondered why it had been placed there. Now he realized that it was most likely not used by anyone except Diogenes himself or his closest aides. They had no choice but to go to him, to explain the situation and demand that he contact Starfleet.

Spock had seemed so tired, though, his nerves on edge, that Kirk refused to allow him to become any more involved until he had rested. Kirk also admitted that he was still in no shape to confront Diogenes himself, so they opted to wait until morning before taking any action.

They did not attend the evening message, but later Spock went to collect their dinner. After they had eaten, both men retired, gratefully seeking in sleep a respite from the consuming pressures of Goodhope.

Chapter Eleven

In the morning, Spock insisted upon returning to the lab. Until they knew for certain that help was coming, he reasoned, he must do what he could to diagnose the disease and find a cure. Kirk agreed. His back was feeling better and he decided to accompany his Science Officer, to observe conditions for himself. Besides, he wanted to keep an eye on Spock.

When they arrived, Bereth was there, looking rather bleary-eyed and haggard, as though he had been working all night. Spock felt a pang of guilt at having left the young man to carry on alone all those hours.

Bereth looked up and smiled wearily as the two men entered. "Good morning, Jim. Spock, I'm so glad you're back. I've divided each of the blood samples into four aliquots and am running cross-matches for the L-14 factor as we discussed yesterday. I've got some unusual numbers here, though, and I wanted your opinion."

Spock immediately crossed to the table and began perusing the data tapes. The two scientists became engrossed for a few minutes and Kirk looked around the room. It hardly qualified as a laboratory at all, compared to the ultimately equipped facilities aboard the Enterprise, where every piece of machinery was the most advanced that science could provide. Like everything else in Goodhope, this building was meagerly stocked and inadequately equipped. It didn't seem that anyone could accomplish anything in a place so lacking in materials.

Kirk's attention was drawn back to Spock and Bereth when he heard the young voice sadden.

"Sanchos died yesterday and little Cindy Taylore last night. Dr. Towers put four more patients on the critical list. I don't know if there have been any more than that. I haven't been out of the lab all night." He closed his eyes a second.

"A child died?" Kirk asked. Bereth opened his eyes and nodded.

"Jon Taylore's little girl - two years old. Jon works on the irrigation project, too." He turned wearily to Spock. "That has to be the key, Spock. It has to have something to do with that area. Almost everyone who's sick has been connected to it in some way."

Spock considered, then spoke to Kirk. "Jim, I'm going over to the hospital. I want to have more blood samples drawn." He turned to Bereth. "Then I think I should go down to the site, collect some more soil and water to process..." he paused and frowned. "We need air samples, too, but... we don't have the equipment." Spock looked around the room, frustrated for a moment, then decided there was nothing he could do about it. He seemed to shrug. "Jim, do you wish to come with me?"

"As a matter of fact," Kirk began, studying his friend, "I do wish I could come with you. However, I think there is something more important I can do. I'm going to see Diogenes right now. Three deaths from an unknown cause, no cure, a fatal accident. We have more than enough reason now. It's time we contacted the Enterprise."

Bereth looked confused. "The Enterprise?"

"A starship," Spock explained. "It is in this sector."

"How do you know that?" Bereth asked, astounded.

Spock did not answer. "I will go to see Diogenes with you," he told Kirk quickly.

"No," Kirk objected. "You have work to do. I'll go over to his office and you collect the samples you need. When the ship gets here, the more information you can give them, the quicker they can process it."

"Bereth can get the samples. I do not think it wise that you confront Diogenes alone. Please, let me..."

Kirk caught the fear in his friend's voice and tried to reassure him. "Look, Spock, I'll admit I'm not eager to face him again, but I don't think he'll try anything and I promise I won't do anything to antagonize him."

Spock was not cheered. "Diogenes is unpredictable. We are not dealing with a rational being. You could be in grave danger."

"It's part of the business, my friend." Kirk managed a tight smile. "Don't worry, and if I'm not back in an hour, come looking for me."

Spock knew the futility of arguing once Kirk had made up his mind. He sighed. "In one hour, I shall be at Diogenes' office."

Kirk nodded. "I'll count on it."

* * * *

Caldin and Leiis looked up from the work table as Kirk strode through the door, but before they had a chance to react, he crossed to the desk and stood before the man seated behind it. Diogenes met his eyes, startled for a moment, then smiled warmly.

"Jim! I'm pleased to see that you are back with us. We need your capable assistance today."

Kirk stood firm, his eyes not leaving the leader's face. "I didn't come to assist you. Three of your people have died, four more are on the critical list. The hospital is filling with sick colonists. It's more than Dr. Towers can handle, and Spock and Bereth don't have the facilities to find a cure. You have to call for outside help."

Caldin had moved around to stand behind Diogenes. The leader's eyes darkened and he frowned

"You were not at the morning message, Jim," he admonished. "That is a serious breach of discipline. All followers, physically able, are expected to attend each message unless excused. Since you are not impaired, you had no excuse."

"I'm not concerned about your 'messages'," Kirk retorted. "I'm talking about sick and dying colonists, an unknown disease with no available cure and no means to obtain one. I'm talking about an epidemic, Diogenes, one that could wipe out Goodhope!"

The leader leaned forward, his fingers curling tightly around the stylus on his desk. "Goodhope takes care of its own," he said simply.

"Goodhope is not equipped to take care of this! You have a transmitter upstairs. Put out an emergency call to the nearest ship in this sector."

Diogenes looked surprised. "Still giving orders? Still looking for solutions... out there." He waved a hand. "When will you learn? You came to this place to get away from that life, if you recall. The stars do not hold your answers, Jim. We'll find our own answers. We have no need of outside interference. Now... I suggest you let me handle the problems and you follow my orders. Leis has been doing twice her work, trying to keep up since you felt too... ill to perform your job yesterday. Please... we are all very pressed... I don't want to find it necessary to... to try to make you understand again. You must learn to trust me."

The man's words, his tone were reasoning, yet his eyes held a quiet command that invited no disagreement. Kirk understood. He leaned over the desk, placing his hands on its smooth surface.

"I promised Spock I would convince you to call for assistance." His voice matched Diogenes' quiet level. "I also told him I would be back in an hour. If he does not hear from me, he'll be *very* upset, and he'll come looking for me. You really wouldn't want that, and... you really couldn't afford to have anything keep him from his research. His scientific knowledge is too valuable in this search for a cure."

Diogenes glared at Kirk. Caldin touched his leader's shoulder as though restraining him.

"Jim, that's enough. Diogenes knows the best way to handle this. He'll decide..." Caldin trailed off. Kirk wasn't listening; his eyes were on Diogenes, a subtle challenge hanging in the air.

Diogenes regarded him for a few minutes, then he leaned back in his chair and shook his head sadly. "You still have not learned to trust me, have you, Jim? Did you believe that something would happen to you if you came here? Did you believe I would be upset by your concern for our people?" His tone was reassuring. "Jim, I'm touched that you feel so strongly about Goodhope. I'm... I'm hurt that you do not hold the same regard for me. But the important thing is you... that you learn to accept what the colony can offer. You're loved in Goodhope, even though I think you doubt that."

"Are you going to call for a ship?" Kirk cut him off.

"When... and if, I believe it becomes necessary, I'll make that choice..."

"It is necessary now."

"That is *your* opinion, and I appreciate it. I'll take it into consideration, but ultimately I must make the final decision."

Diogenes' answer rang in Kirk's ears, a strange sense of déjà vu. How often had he spoken the same words himself?

"It is not only my opinion. Spock is convinced we need help. It is his scientific conclusion that we will be unable to isolate the disease in the time necessary to prevent any more deaths."

"It is interesting," Diogenes' sarcasm returned, "that he chooses to report his findings to you, rather than to me."

"I believe it will be much less interesting to you to see what happens if you do not listen to what I'm telling you." Kirk ignored Diogenes' tone. The leader seemed to consider, then decided.

"Very well. I will talk with Spock and hear his recommendations."

"I'll come with you," Kirk stated.

"I don't think so... "

"I told you, Spock will be concerned if he doesn't hear from me within an hour."

Diogenes gauged the other man, then sighed. "Still skeptical, eh, Jim?" He paused, waiting for an answer. When none came, he stood up. "Come then, if you wish, so your protective Vulcan can see for himself that you are untouched." He moved around the desk and stood close to Kirk. "But when we are finished speaking with him, you and I will return here. There still is work to be done, and I expect you to do your share... if you expect to continue to eat..." Not waiting for Kirk to answer, he brushed past him and went out the door so that it slammed behind him before Kirk reached it. Diogenes was already down the path toward the infirmary by the time Kirk could catch up with him.

* * * *

Patients lining the benches and standing against the wall in the waiting room saw Diogenes, followed by Kirk, as the two men entered. They were barely inside when the atmosphere changed from one of desolation, sickness and apathy, to joy, hope and faith in the powerful man who strode through their midst. Several called his name, a few came forward to grasp his hand or his arm. They all looked ill or in pain, yet their eyes suddenly shone with life at Diogenes' presence. The twenty or thirty colonists crowded into the tiny room began murmuring reassurances to each other, and a sense of well-being permeated the group now that their leader was present.

Elci Towers emerged from the back rooms to see the cause of the excitement. She looked unkempt, distraught, but she smiled broadly when she saw Diogenes. The leader gently extricated himself from several patients who had claimed his hands and arms, and crossed to the woman, his face grave.

"Elci, I've come to see Spock." He glanced around the room, then lowered his voice. "What is all this?"

"They've been coming in since last night, all complaining of the same symptoms. We're doing our best to see everybody as quickly as possible. Spock is in the room at the end of the hall with Gordon."

Diogenes didn't answer. He moved past her in the direction she had indicated, and again Kirk followed. As they approached, Dr. Towers' voice could be heard, and he was apparently angry about something.

"At least we're making progress, Spock!"

"This, Doctor, is not progress. We're accomplishing nothing." There was an edge of irritation in the Vulcan's soft voice.

Kirk and Diogenes entered and the two scientists looked up. Kirk's eyes met Spock's and saw a flicker of relief before Vulcan control clamped back in place.

Dr. Towers rose unsteadily. He seemed even older and more frail than Kirk remembered, and the sight of his stained coverall and quivering hands did nothing to inspire confidence in his medical skill. Towers did not smile; he seemed almost frightened by the leader's intrusion.

"Diogenes, I was not expecting you..."

The leader clipped off his stammering. "What's the situation here?"

Towers made a show of rumaging through the papers and tapes in front of him. "We've isolated the source of the microbes..."

"Which is a long way from synthesizing a cure, provided we have the necessary chemicals with which to work," Spock finished.

Diogenes glanced curiously at Spock, but he addressed Towers. "The source?"

"The water. Out at the irrigation field, we began utilizing a new supply which has its origin deep in the soil. Apparently it was contaminated by a strain of bacteria which went undetected in our original tests." Towers seemed to squirm.

"A standard PQ test would have ascertained the danger," Spock qualified. "However, there is no apresapone to administer such a test in Goodhope."

"So, what does this mean?" Diogenes now looked to Spock. "If the cause has been isolated, cannot a serum be concocted?"

"We know so little about the properties. The disease is apparently caused by the contaminated water, which in turn has irrigated the crops and is ingested along with the food. The symptoms are reminiscent of the old Earth fevers, Typhoid, Cholera, and a few others. But it will take considerable time, even in a well-equipped laboratory, to discover what combination will destroy the germ without inflicting harm on the individual who is affected. This is a totally unfamiliar strain, and Goodhope's pharmaceutical supplies are seriously insufficient." Spock had not paused in the explanation, and now he regarded Diogenes with disfavor.

The leader looked over at Towers. "Do you concur, Doctor?"

Towers discomfort was apparent. "It *is* a... challenge, Diogenes. But... Goodhope has *a*lways met its challenges."

Diogenes smiled at him. "How long, in your estimation, before we have a serum?"

"Perhaps... two weeks?"

"That's too long." Kirk could keep quiet no longer. "How many may die during that time?"

"Jim feels that we should seek outside help." Diogenes remained unruffled.

"I concur," Spock nodded. "The facilities on a starship can allow us to have the answer in a matter of hours."

"But isn't it possible that a starship may take several days, perhaps weeks to reach us, anyway?" Diogenes asked.

Kirk and Spock exchanged glances, a movement not lost on the leader, then Spock answered. "It *is* possible that, assuming a starship is in the sector, it may take some time to reach us. However, it is at least worth trying. Once we have contacted them, I can relay data and receive information from their computers while they are enroute."

Diogenes regarded Spock. "You seem very informed about starship procedures, Spock."

The Vulcan nodded, but offered no explanation. Finally, Diogenes continued. "I am not anxious to subject the colonists to outside interference. Most of our people are uncomfortable with strangers, and I am not convinced it is yet necessary to take such drastic action."

"What will convince you?" Kirk interrupted. Diogenes looked at him sharply.

"You and Spock are still new to Goodhope. You have not been with us long enough to know that we have faced problems before and have survived them on our own. Goodhope must rely on itself, prove itself. Dr. Towers has been here since the beginning. He remembers. He understands, don't you, Gordon?"

Towers averted his eyes, staring at a beaker on his desk. "Yes, Diogenes. I understand."

"Do you believe we should call for help?" Diogenes prompted.

Towers still did not look up. "I... I don't believe we should. Goodhope takes care of its own."

"I disagree," Spock said quickly.

"Well," Diogenes considered. "I have two different opinions from my two experts. Which shall I accept? One, my trusted and long-standing physician, and the other, a brilliant newcomer who knows much about science but has much to learn about Goodhope."

"People are dying. There is no cure available," Kirk said angrily, impatient with his position.

"Ah, yes, then we have the former Starfleet officer, who is accustomed to making decisions, used to giving commands, who finds it difficult to yield his will." Diogenes seemed to smile.

"Do you *want* people to die?" Kirk unleashed his anger. "You have eyes to see what's happening. What are you really afraid of?"

Diogenes' gaze darkened and he moved toward Kirk. In an instant, Spock was at his side. The leader stared at the two for a moment, then he sighed.

"I am afraid of bigotry and lies, of my followers being hurt in ways more serious than physical illness. You speak of starships and their wonders, yet you left them, you were disillusioned and hurt. I do not trust those who will not understand, who seek to flaunt their superiority by use of technology and impose their ways on those less endowed. They have destroyed cultures and civilizations by their so-called peaceful intervention. The prime directive is a myth. If I ask for help from a starship, I ask for an invasion by a cancer - one that is just as deadly as this epidemic we face. I will not allow that to happen in Goodhope! Now, let me ask you. Are you and Spock in a position at this time to challenge my authority?"

"I do challenge your authority to decide that people will die," Kirk defied.

"I know you do," Diogenes said quietly. "It is, indeed, the most difficult kind of responsibility to accept. But I *must* do what I believe is best for the majority of my beloveds. I *need* your help, your skills, Goodhope needs Spock. We *must* have a cure, and we will find one... eventually. With or without your co-operation. The longer it takes, the more people will die. Now, I have listened to your arguments, I have been patient because I respect your intelligence and your concern. I have made my decision. If you choose not to respect that decision, choose not to afford me the same consideration that I have given you, then stay out of my way. I have no more time, Dr. Towers has no more time, to waste trying to placate you." Diogenes suddenly turned and strode out of the room. Towers glanced about nervously.

"You push your luck. He's very upset with you. I've never known him to be so tolerant as that..." He gathered up some tapes and hurried out the door.

The Enterprise officers stood facing the doorway. Kirk shrugged.

"Well, I guess I didn't really expect him to agree to call the ship," he said morosely.

Spock was observing him carefully. "Jim, are you all right?"

"What? Oh, yes," Kirk assured. "He's being very foolish, taking a big risk."

"The situation is becoming worse," Spock agreed. "You saw how many people are being effected."

"Is it possible to isolate the serum without the ship?"

Spock was thoughtful. "Unknown. It will take time."

"Well, do what you can." Kirk sighed. "In the meantime, I'll go back to the office and pretend to go along with him until I can discover a way to get to that communications console."

"Jim..." Spock began.

"Yes, my friend, I'll be careful," Kirk promised.

Chapter Twelve

There was no chance to reach the transmitter in Diogenes' private quarters. Kirk spent the rest of the day in the office, where work went on as usual. Away from the infirmary, from the labs, it almost seemed as if things were normal in Goodhope, that no threat of an epidemic existed. The only indication of something out of order was that the large number of workers reporting sick necessitated juggling assignments. Since Kirk was largely responsible for the labor personnel, Leiis had been handling the scheduling alone. She was more than a little grateful to see Kirk return.

Throughout the day, Diogenes, Caldin or one of his close aides was always present in the office. Kirk knew that the leader suspected that he would try to reach the transmitter, so a subtle game of caution and innocence was being acted out with both sides aware of the opponent's intention.

By evening, Kirk was tense and irritated, his back feeling the soreness of his recent flogging. He declined Leiis' invitation to share the message and evening meal with her, explaining that he was not up to enduring the words of Diogenes from the hard ground of the Rotunda. She was disappointed and concerned, and Kirk realized when she offered to bring his meal to his cabin, that her interest was more than passive. Leiis had been a woman of experience before Goodhope, and Kirk knew that she was attracted to him now. He was not surprised therefore, when later, a soft rap on his cabin door turned out to be the young lady.

"I brought your supper," she smiled, extending the tray of food. Kirk stood back, allowing her to enter.

"Thank you, Leiis." Kirk realized that he was very hungry. Leiis crossed to place it on the table, and he followed. "How did you manage this?"

"One of the servers is a good friend. I told her you were not feeling well." Kirk sat down gratefully to begin the meal. Leiis poured some water into a cup and placed it in front of him. "I did not see your friend Spock at the gathering."

Kirk took a sip of the water. "He's still working at the lab. I stopped by there after I left the office and he was too busy to leave. Someone was going to bring his meal over to him. He's devoting all his time to finding a cure for this illness."

Leiis nodded, taking a chair opposite Kirk. "Yes, Diogenes spoke of it at the message. He said it was serious, but that we were not to be alarmed - that Dr. Towers would have the treatment very soon now."

"Shit!" Kirk slammed his utensil down. "He's lying! There is no treatment, Leiis, and there won't be if he doesn't send for outside help. Spock's the best scientist in Goodhope, and without the proper equipment, even he can't isolate the disease soon enough to prevent a massive epidemic."

The girl looked alarmed by his anger. "Jim, you mustn't think like that. If Diogenes says it will be all right, it will. He'll take care of it. You must trust him."

Kirk looked across the table at the sincere, frightened eyes and shook his head. "Colonists are dead. More are dying. There's a starship in this sector. Diogenes refuses to call it."

"Then he must not believe it's necessary. Diogenes knows best. Goodhope takes care of its own."

Abruptly, Kirk stood, pushing his chair back. He walked away from the table, frustrated by

the familiar, mechanical words. When he had gained some distance, he turned to look at her.

"Don't you understand? Goodhope doesn't have the facilities to handle this alone. Spock is working himself to death, risking his health, while Diogenes puts everybody's life in jeopardy because he's too stubborn, too proud, too... impressed with his own importance to listen to reason." He turned away, clenching his fists, his body straining against the helplessness of his position. Leiis rose and came up behind him, wrapping her arms gently around his taut frame.

"Jim, you must not become so agitated," she soothed, leaning her head against his back. "The tension will make you ill. You still have not regained your full strength. Your muscles are all coiled and your back... "

Kirk whirled and grabbed her by the shoulders. "There's a transmitter in Diogenes' private quarters, Leiis. I have to get to it." His voice was determined, yet pleading. Leiis pulled back a little, frightened.

"Why?"

"To call the starship. To get help to Goodhope."

"Without Diogenes' permission?" The girl was becoming more fearful.

"He's a dangerous man. He feeds you lies, promises and platitudes. He has killed Anton Law. He is killing others by refusing medical treatment for the disease."

"You sound like a dissenter," she accused weakly.

"Leiis, everyone in Goodhope is in a frightening situation, if you continue to blindly follow him."

"Are you not one of us, Jim?" she was incredulous. Kirk hesitated at the expression of hurt on her face.

"I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to help all of us."

Leiis pulled away from him and crossed to the couch. She sat down and folded her hands on her lap, her face revealing the conflict of indecision.

"Diogenes has always helped us," she said quietly. Kirk remembered another woman - or at least he had believed she was a woman - forced to make a choice between the man she wanted and the man she worshipped. Rayna had said, 'I choose...' and had died. Kirk realized he had almost forgotten...

He moved to sit beside Leiis and took her hands in his. "Leiis, I'm worried." His voice was tender. "And I'm frightened about what's happening here. I don't like what I've seen, but I can't sit by and watch innocent people destroyed. I'm... sorry it has to be this way."

She looked at him quizzically. "Who are you? You did not come to Goodhope seeking a new life like the rest of us."

Kirk chose his words carefully. "I came to Goodhope seeking... the truth, Leiis."

"And have you found it?"

"Yes." Kirk's voice was sad. Leiis pulled her hands away and stood up quickly.

"I don't want to hear any more," she protested, but her voice lacked conviction. Kirk rose and stepped in front of her.

"Diogenes suspects that I'll try to contact the ship. He won't leave the office unguarded. I'm going to need help to get to that transmitter."

Leiis faced him, suddenly challenging. "Why should I help you? What makes you think I even believe you? You speak treason. You blaspheme our leader with your lies and accusations. Diogenes has given us life. What right have you to betray that? You did not come to seek truth, you came

to destroy. How would you know what is truth, you've been living a lie since you arrived. You need to be purged of your wickedness. The beating you received did not touch you." She brushed past him and headed for the door. Kirk followed, caught her arm and spun her around.

"You're a telepath, Leiis. You have the ability to sense things. You believe me because you have 'seen' what is going on in Goodhope. Diogenes has robbed you of your talent..." Leiis shook her head in denial, but he pushed on. "It's not a curse. People with telepathic powers are respected and useful all over the galaxy. Even your pyrotechnical tendencies, properly trained, can be an asset. I have seen and worked with people with many capabilities. Look inside yourself and see the good there. Then look around you. Let yourself feel what is right. Don't suppress what is yours."

Leiis began to cry. "You don't know what it was like before. Diogenes took me in, brought me to Goodhope, gave me a home. Here, I'm loved, accepted..."

"Do you want these people to die?"

"No!"

"Then, help me. Help me get to that transmitter."

"I... I... can't." She met his eyes, pleading. "Please, Jim, don't ask me to do this."

"I have to. One way or another, we must get help to the colony."

"Diogenes has always taken care of us." Her protest was very weak.

"Leiis, people can't depend on someone else to take care of them. It's time you started thinking for yourselves, directing your own lives. A serious crisis exists in Goodhope, and Diogenes intends to do nothing about it. Will you all stand by and do nothing, too?"

"I am not able to do anything. I am only an insignificant helper..."

Kirk smiled and touched her cheek. "You're not insignificant... don't ever say that about yourself. Leiis..."

She hesitated, then pulled away abruptly. "I have to go. I shouldn't have stayed."

Turning, she hurried from the cabin. Kirk took a breath and rubbed a hand over his eyes. This, he knew, was exactly the kind of response he would get from most of Diogenes' followers. They were frightened, programmed individuals, and his words confused them. It did not seem likely that he would be able to convince them of the danger that awaited them. Dr, he wondered, would it make a difference if they knew?

* * * *

Spock did not return to the cabin, and in the morning Kirk again stopped at the lab. Spock and Bereth were still working and had been up all night, Bereth catching cat-naps between timed experiments, and Spock insisting that Vulcans could function for days without sleep. Dr. Towers had reported that another patient had died during the night.

Determinedly, Kirk headed for Diogenes' office. The leader was not there, nor was Leiis, but Caldin and several other aides were very much in evidence. Kirk pulled out the assignment records and began going over them, conscious of Caldin's eyes on him every minute. Finally, later in the afternoon, Caldin and the others left, and Kirk saw his chance.

The stairway to the second floor was just outside the doorway, in a back storage room. Cautiously, Kirk climbed the steps and, for the first time, entered the private rooms of the colony leader. The stairway opened on a tiny hallway, with a room on either side. The door to one room was closed. The other seemed to be a living room - kitchen combination, sparsely furnished with a table and chairs, a stove, sink and cupboard. On the other side of the room was a couch and grouping of several chairs around a long, low table. On two walls were shelves containing volumes of old-style paper books, which appeared to be the only concession Diogenes made to not living as meagerly as his followers.

As Kirk took a few steps forward, searching for the communications console, he heard the door to the room across the hall open. Spinning around, he confronted Diogenes, who stood in the doorway to his bedroom. The leader was dressed in a thin, white robe, tied at the waist with a golden cord. He was barefoot, his long yellow hair disarrayed, his eyes glittering ice-green fire. In his hand, he aimed a phaser.

Kirk stared at the white giant, then past him - into the room. It was sumptuously appointed. He could see a massive bed dominating the center, glimpses of rich fabrics in shades of green and gold and shimmering white. The walls were a gallery of paintings with heavy, gilded frames, and the odor of sweet, floral scents filled the air.

On the bed was a girl - naked - trying to cover her crouching body with the satin bedclothes. Kirk caught her eye and she looked away. *Leiis*.

Diogenes drew his attention back to the doorway. "I ought to kill you right now and be done with it. I'd need no explanation for shooting a trespasser who dares to enter my private quarters." He pulled the door closed behind him, still keeping the phaser pointed. Kirk lifted his chin.

"You know why I'm here. If you're not willing to transmit an SOS, I am."

"You came to Goodhope to bring trouble - you and your partner, Spock. You are not an honest man. You have lied deceitfully. You seek only to destroy me, but you will be the one destroyed." Carefully, Diogenes moved past Kirk, keeping the phaser leveled. Without taking his eyes from the captain, he used his free hand to remove a book from one of the shelves. Then he reached into the vacant space and withdrew a small, round disc, and held it up for Kirk to see.

"This was sewn into the seam of your shirt. Why would you have such a device concealed there?"

Kirk stared at the missing transmitter. "You *did* take it!"

Diogenes smiled maliciously. "What a pity, isn't it? You haven't been able to send any transmissions to... what? Your ship? Yess... that's why you were so positive a ship would be nearby to answer. But you didn't have this little device, did you? So, you had to try to use mine!"

"For God's sake, Diogenes, use it now. Call for medical help." Kirk tried once more.

"For *God's* sake? What god? I am the only god in Goodhope."

"You're not a god, Diogenes. You're not even a decent human being. You allow the people who trust you to suffer and die. You're cruel, power-starved -- "

"Silence!" Diogenes screamed. "You dare to speak to me this way? You - a nothing! I hold your life in my hands. Now you will lose it."

Kirk felt a cold lump of panic as he realized the leader was not bluffing. The man's eyes were glazed, wild with anger. There was no reason in him. Too late, Kirk decided that he had, perhaps, pushed too far. He took a breath.

"Let's... talk about this," he stalled, assessing his position. It did not seem likely that he could overpower Diogenes and gain the weapon, or that he could dissuade him from his intent. There was *Leiis* in the bedroom who could read minds... perhaps if he concentrated, he could reach her...

Whether by his will, or from the woman's own concern and curiosity, the bedroom door opened slightly and *Leiis*, a robe wrapped around her, peered out, frightened.

Diogenes' eyes flicked over her briefly. "Get back inside. I am not through with you."

She looked at Kirk, tormented. "Jim?"

Diogenes caught the concern in her voice. "Do as I tell you!" he ordered.

Leiis hesitated, just as the sound of a door slamming below was heard. There were footsteps on the stairs, quick and heavy.

"Diogenes -- " Caldin's voice reached them before they saw him. The leader was distracted for a moment, and Kirk seized the opportunity. He made a fast lunge, caught Diogenes off-guard, and managed to knock the phaser from his hand. There was no time to retrieve it before Caldin burst into the room, his phaser also drawn at the sound of the scuffle.

"Hold it," he announced, halting Kirk's movement.

"Come in, my Beloved!" Diogenes seemed exhilarated, heightened by the action. Kirk saw the madness gleaming in his eyes. He also saw Caldin's hesitation. The aide's jaw tightened and his eyes narrowed as he took in the tableau of Leis, Kirk and Diogenes.

The leader gained his feet. "Caldin... you were told to keep an eye on him. How the hell did he get up here? Where were you?"

Caldin was staring at Leis with contempt. The girl seemed to shrink away from the look.

"Something... came up... " Caldin told him. "I can't be two places at once."

Diogenes' attention was back on Kirk, however. If the leader were aware of the by-play between his two devoted allies, he did not indicate it. He smiled at Kirk as he held up the button-like transmitter.

"You say this is yours, but you are wrong. You have nothing in Goodhope, save that which I choose to give you. Everything here belongs to me." He tossed the instrument on the table. "Go ahead, Jim, take it, if it is so important to you. It doesn't work, of course. I took the components apart. Couldn't have you calling in outsiders... "

Warily, Kirk reached for the transmitter and picked it up. Diogenes had been telling the truth. The device had been dismantled.

"You're insane!"

"Perhaps." Diogenes seemed to consider. "Depending upon which standards you base sanity. I could also say the same thing about you for believing you could betray me and get away with it. I chose to give you that transmitter, just as I chose to let you live. You see, we *are* kind in Goodhope. Now, get out of here."

"Not until I -- " Kirk began, surprised by Diogenes' sudden change of attitude. Yet he remembered he had seen it before in the man. He heard Caldin urging him.

"Jim, just *go*. For your own sake, leave!"

"Caldin, go with him," Diogenes instructed. "As you can see, I'm occupied right now... "

"Diogenes... " Caldin's voice was pleading. The aide was obviously distraught and embarrassed, but it seemed to make no difference to the colony leader. Deliberately, Diogenes turned his back on them and crossed to Leis, putting a hand possessively on her arm.

With the phaser, Caldin sharply indicated Kirk toward the stairs. "Go on, now. Move it."

Kirk decided he had no more options. When they reached the bottom of the stairway, Kirk turned to face the aide. "He doesn't care about you, can't you see that? He uses you -- "

Caldin swung the phaser, catching Kirk on the jaw. Kirk fell backwards, stunned, then crumpled when Caldin kicked him between the legs. The stabbing pain in his groin blotted out everything for a moment, and Kirk cursed himself for his error in judgment.

Caldin pulled him to his feet. "Why did you come to Goodhope? You're not a seeker of the truth. You seek only to destroy!"

"I'm... trying to *help* you - can't you understand? You're all doomed if you continue to follow him."

"Death is unimportant. It is the quality of life which matters." Caldin's eyes drifted up the stairs. "I would die more than once... for him. But you wouldn't know about that kind of devotion. I pity you."

Kirk wiped at the blood on his chin, disgusted with the single-minded loyalty of Diogenes' followers. "An admirable concept, Caldin. Someday, you may get the chance to prove your willingness to die."

Kirk's sarcasm was lost on the man. "Then, so be it," Caldin agreed. "I would gladly..." A sharp, feminine cry came from upstairs. Caldin stiffened, his gaze once more drawn in that direction.

In one swift movement, Kirk was on him. A hard blow to the jaw sent the aide reeling backward, his head crashing against the wall, but he hung onto the weapon. His knee came up and pushed Kirk away. Before Kirk could strike again, Caldin had the phaser pointed at his midsection. Kirk froze. Caldin's eyes blazed, blood ran down his face; he was dazed, but he kept the weapon pointed at Kirk.

"Damn you! Damn you to hell! Get out! Get out of here now, before I kill you!"

Kirk knew another attempt would be useless. Quickly, he moved past Caldin and out the door, the sounds of Leis' muffled cries still ringing in his ears.

Chapter Thirteen

Chief Medical Officer Leonard McCoy stepped onto the bridge of the Enterprise. In the center seat, Montgomery Scott noted his arrival and heaved a sigh.

"No, Doctor, we've nae heard a word yet."

McCoy came to stand beside the chair. "Well, what the hell are you waiting for? It's been three days since their expected check-in report. Something's gone wrong!"

"Aye... perhaps." Scott stressed the last word. "But we've nae proof, as I told you yesterday, and the Captain left specific orders -- "

McCoy fidgeted. "Yes, I know, Scotty."

"If we were to go bargain' in there, blow their mission, and find out nothing was wrong... well, I wouldnae like to face Captain Kirk. Three days isnae really that long, and nothing on the previous tapes indicated trouble of any sort...did it?" Scott looked almost hopefully toward McCoy.

"I'm not sure, Scotty." The doctor was thoughtful, remembering the faint prickle of unease he had felt while listening as the tapes arrived. "Something..." he trailed off.

"Well, Doctor, you give me a reason - a logged, medical evaluation, and I'll move this ship to Albion 7 at warp speed. Otherwise, we have to assume that the Captain has a sound reason for not transmitting."

McCoy sensed the worry in the engineer's voice. He put a hand on his shoulder and straightened. "I'll be back," he promised.

* * * *

There were nearly four hours of recording which had been sent to the Enterprise over thirty-two days from Goodhope. McCoy was listening to all of it together for the second time, and now inconsistencies were beginning to surface.

Taken individually, there was nothing to question about the factual reports and observations. Most were brief, routine analyses. Reviewed collectively, however, McCoy could discern changes in

Kirk's speech patterns, his tone and inflections, but he was not certain, yet, what if anything they meant.

The early reports were spontaneous, positive statements of a well-kept, thriving colony, yet tinged with skepticism. They had become enthusiastic, citing Diogenes' teachings as noble, the goals of the colony as praiseworthy. He spoke of being impressed by the people and emphasized that while some of the ways seemed harsh, it was nonetheless consistent with the life of a struggling society. Then, almost imperceptively at first, the tone of the reports changed. There was an edge of wariness to Kirk's voice, less personal comments. Later, the wariness increased to an obvious level, so that it seemed to McCoy that Kirk were choosing each word very carefully, as if he were extremely conscious of influencing the listener, as if he were reluctant to give the wrong impression.

McCoy was disappointed that there were no tapes from Spock, although Kirk mentioned each time that the Commander was present and concurred with his reports. Still, the doctor would have preferred a comparison to see if he picked up on the same patterns in the Vulcan.

While the reason for the change remained an enigma, McCoy was convinced that, for some purpose, Kirk was not telling everything.

Am I looking for an excuse, McCoy wondered. Jim asked me not to jump to rash conclusions ... but, three days overdue? What's happening down there?

He forwarded the tape to the last transmission. Kirk talked about the arrival of the fifty new colonists and how charged and excited everyone seemed to be.

What about the boy... ? McCoy worried. On the previous transmission, Kirk had declared that he was going to Diogenes about him, and yet, on the next tape, several days later, he made no further mention of it.

It's not like Jim to leave things dangling...

Precision - that's it! The reports were becoming less precise, less detached. Was a subtle form of conditioning effecting the two officers? And if so, did that sufficiently explain why the transmissions had stopped or been delayed?

McCoy had heard enough, thought enough. Kirk had charged him with evaluating the situation through the tapes, urging caution, but the ultimate decision must be McCoy's. The doctor now felt there was adequate evidence to support a closer look. He pressed a button on his intercom.

"Scotty? This is McCoy. I'll be there in five minutes with my recommendation."

"Which is...? Scott asked.

"Full speed ahead for Goodhope."

* * * *

Kirk woke as usual, summoned to awareness by the clanging of the morning alarm. He pushed the blanket aside and rolled over to peer at the still-sleeping Vulcan across from him. Spock had returned to the cabin late, looking so exhausted that Kirk had refrained from detailing the events in Diogenes' quarters, and had recounted only the briefest synopsis of the incident. Then he had insisted that Spock go to bed immediately, and had been surprised when his friend complied without protest.

Now, as he gazed at the prone figure, he felt a pang of remorse. *He's been working too hard... pushing himself.* For a moment, Kirk considered not waking him, then decided he'd better not allow the luxury. Spock's skills were needed to help find a cure, and until they could contact the Enterprise, he had to at least try to help the people of the colony. Kirk's humanitarian traits overrode his personal concerns for his friend.

The Vulcan stirred restlessly, the sound of the alarm, no doubt, finally invading his sleep. Kirk crawled over to him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Spock...?" Kirk tried to decide if the heat radiating from Spock was warmer than usual.

He didn't like the dark smudges under Spock's eyes, or the heavy, slow sigh as he stirred.

"I... overslept... " Spock struggled to sit up, dazed as Kirk had seldom seen him waken. Spock always sprang to alertness, no matter how little sleep he'd managed.

"No harm done. You don't look too well. How do you feel?"

"Tired." Spock rubbed a hand over his face and proceeded toward the ladder. "Come, we must hurry."

Kirk was not thoroughly convinced by the show of bravado, but there was no time to speak of it. Quickly, they dressed and left the cabin.

Kirk watched him carefully during breakfast. Spock toyed with the food, and when he did take a mouthful, he seemed to have difficulty swallowing.

Lethargy... sore throat... the first symptoms of the fever. Kirk made his voice stern. "You'd better report to the infirmary after the message."

"Unnecessary. I can be more useful in the lab."

"You're sick... " Kirk protested.

Spock shook his head. "Indeed not, Jim. Merely fatigued and anxious to isolate the germ."

"Well, take it easy today." Kirk was still skeptical. "That's an order."

Spock raised an eyebrow in irony.

* * * *

It was after midday when Bereth came tearing into the office. Kirk was alone except for two file clerks, stationed there obviously to keep an eye on him.

"Where is Diogenes?" Bereth gulped.

"He's... with the new colonists, I think. What's wrong?"

"It's Spock. He collapsed in the lab."

Kirk threw the papers he was holding down on the table and started out. Bereth ran after him.

"I think it's the fever. Diogenes must know. If Spock goes down, we haven't a chance to find a cure!"

"What the hell can Diogenes do?" Kirk stormed. "Or, what *will* he do? Damn it, man, you people had better start taking on some of the responsibility yourselves, because your honored leader's going to lead you all into an early grave!"

Bereth was too stunned to speak. As Kirk entered the laboratory, he didn't even notice that the scientist was no longer behind him.

He found Spock sitting on the floor, leaning against one of the benches. His face was drained of color and his body trembled as he clung to the wooden leg for support.

Kirk dropped to his knees beside him, noticing a thin trickle of green blood on his face, where he had cut himself falling. He reached for him.

"Here... take it easy..."

The Vulcan looked disoriented, confused, but he leaned willingly toward Kirk, transferring his grip to Kirk's arm. A shudder wracked the tensed muscles.

"Jim...? How did you... ?

"Don't talk..." Kirk put a hand on his forehead, positive now that it was much hotter than normal. "Damn... damn..." he swore softly, "you've got it."

Spock shivered again and tried to pull himself together. "It would seem so..."

Kirk looked around the lab for the first time, realizing they were alone. He would have to get Spock to his feet, take him to the doctor. "Can you stand?"

The Vulcan answered by recovering sufficiently to rise, with Kirk's assistance. He was unsteady, but mobile.

"It's not far to the infirmary..." Kirk put an arm around his waist.

Spock sighed heavily. "There is no point in wasting our time. There is nothing they can do. No medicine... I've been there twice this morning to collect samples. The rooms are crowded with sick people... Towers is becoming irrational..."

Kirk knew he was right. The doctor would look at Spock, tell him what they already knew, and send him home to bed. It was all they were doing for the stricken colonists.

"All right. I'll help you back to the cabin."

"I should finish..." Spock began.

"Negative. You should rest. C'mon." Kirk guided him out of the lab.

* * * *

At the cabin, Kirk settled Spock into the loft and went for towels and water to cool down his fevered body. Pouring the water into a basin, Kirk tried to swallow past the lump in his throat. He knew the Vulcan's ability to mask and ignore physical discomfort, yet he chastized himself for not noticing sooner that his friend had contracted the disease. Spock must have known for several days, and even now his extreme distress must be worse than he was willing to admit.

Quickly, he returned to the loft. Spock was lying as he had left him, his eyes staring bleakly at the ceiling, lips pursed in annoyance. He turned his head at Kirk's approach and fixed him with a baleful glance.

"This is impossible," he muttered. "Every safety precaution was observed..."

"Half the colony's infected," Kirk retorted, "and race seems to be no factor."

"Jim..." Spock's eyes were clouded, worried, as Kirk began to wipe gently at his face with the wet cloth. He made a feeble effort to catch Kirk's arm.

"Don't say it. I'm not leaving." Kirk met his eyes steadily.

"The contagion rate is --"

"High, I know. And the germs are present everywhere. I have as much chance of coming down with it as anyone else. Now, hush, and try to relax." Kirk tried to make his voice stern.

"How can I relax, when..." The Vulcan struggled to rise.

"Spock - be still!" Kirk took his shoulders in his hands and pushed him back down. "Please... I'll take care of it..." he coaxed. "Just... let me... think. I have to consider... plan..."

Spock shivered, suddenly chilled, and Kirk pressed the blanket around him, cradling his head on his arm.

"... Curious..." Spock mumbled. "I feel so... weightless... need... antigravs..."

"It's the fever." Kirk felt the tension grip him tighter.

Just then, both men heard the scraping of the door. Spock reacted groggily, only mildly concerned, but to Kirk it was as if the hinges scraped on his raw nerves.

From below, a resonant voice called, "Jim... Spock?"

It was Diogenes. Kirk's blood seemed to chill with the unexpected presence of the colony leader. Carefully, he released Spock and straightened.

"I'll handle this. Try to rest..." he told the Vulcan. Quickly, he scrambled down the ladder and turned to face Diogenes. The pale green eyes were fixed coldly on him.

"I just learned what happened. Where is Spock?"

"He's resting - trying to," Kirk told him, unable to keep the bitterness from his voice.

"Is it - " the leader began, but Kirk cut him off.

"Yes, it's the fever. Admit it, Diogenes, you just lost your only chance of finding a cure here at Goodhope. With Spock out, you'll have to notify Starfleet."

Diogenes regarded him, seeming to control his fury. "Still giving orders? You have all the answers, don't you, Jim? I came here because I am concerned about Spock - not as a scientist, but as one of my own."

"You'd better be concerned about all of your people, and get them some help - fast! I'll take care of Spock."

"You are so very certain that the answer to all this lies outside of Goodhope, aren't you?" Diogenes moved around the room. "Outside... hatred, bigotry, persecution. I have abolished all that in Goodhope. I have sheltered and cared for my flock, nurtured and protected them! I am their answer."

"High-sounding words, Diogenes, but *you* don't have a cure for this disease!"

"A disease of the flesh, the body. What is this compared to satisfaction of the soul? The body is frail, it decays..." he moved toward the loft. "I can help Spock..."

Kirk crossed the room to quickly bar his way. "Stay down from there. Leave him alone. He doesn't need your preaching and platitudes. He needs medical treatment."

Diogenes took a step backward, fury burning at Kirk. "You dare attempt to prevent *me* from administering to one of my own?"

Kirk met the anger with cold determination. "You go near him and I'll kill you. I swear it, Diogenes. You don't own people. They don't belong to you. Goodhope is a Federation colony. It's people are Federation citizens, under Federation protection. Your authority here is answerable to a higher court..."

Diogenes twitched. He raised his hand as if to strike, then held back. "Enough!" he shouted. "I am the law in Goodhope. You will see, James Kirk!"

"I do see," Kirk answered. "I see death and suffering and punishment for disobedience. I'm sick of your misguided omnipotence, of people who are blinded by your lies and badgered into a belief of your supremacy. You preach love and acceptance, but it's all a myth created for the elevation of your power. Well, right now I'm sick of Goodhope, and I don't give a damn about your so-called ideals. My friend is ill because of this place and all I'm concerned about is getting help for him before it's too late. I'm sorry for these people who refuse to see what you really are, refuse to see how you manipulate their lives."

Diogenes' eyes narrowed and he seemed to gauge Kirk. "Yes, I manipulate their lives," he admitted. "Because without me, they are nothing, outcasts of society, scorned, shunned. They muddle through life. I have given them purpose, a sense of dignity, a place and a home. You think you know what Goodhope is. You know nothing."

Kirk took a breath. "Is the kind of submission you demand any better than the life they

left? What dignity is there in rejection of self-will? Haven't they really exchanged one miserable existence for another?"

"For those answers," Diogenes said, "you will have to ask my followers." He crossed to the door, then paused and turned back. His eyes were moist with tears and he glanced toward the loft. "I am truly sorry about Spock, and truly sorry about you, Jim. I could have given you so much."

Kirk's eyes were hard. "Don't waste too much sorrow on us. There's only one thing you can give me - access to that transmitter."

Sadly, Diogenes shook his head. "I'm sorry about that, too, but the answer must be no." He pulled open the door and was gone.

Chapter Fourteen

Lt. Commander Montgomery Scott did not enjoy the position in which he had been placed. Command was all right, he reflected, as long as things were routine and clear-cut. It was the gray areas, such as his present situation, which could drive a man to drink.

"E.T.A., Mr. Sulu?"

The helmsman turned to answer. "Three hours to Albion, Mr. Scott."

"Uhura, how soon before we can -- "

"Coming within range now, sir," she answered, without waiting for him to finish. Scott turned to regard her, a look of patient amusement on his face, and she smiled back at him, chagrined at her own anticipation.

Scott knew that the entire bridge crew was relieved to be taking action, each of them anxious to discover how their Captain and First Officer were faring at Goodhope Colony. Scott sighed. It must be the right decision, then. One thing James Kirk had always told him was to trust the instincts of the highly-trained senior officers.

McCoy stood up from his leaning position at the railing and came down into the well.

"Don't look so sour - we're only five days early, anyway. It's probably not going to make that much difference to the mission."

"Doctor you don't understand. It's not merely a case of blowin' their cover. Why do you think they were sent incognito in the first place? We still can't let this Diogenes person realize that he's been duped."

"As Jim would say, I trust you'll handle this... diplomatically, Mr. Scott," McCoy chided.

"Oh, aye, I'll do that for sure. But it'll be a tricky bit of maneuvering." Scott stood and crossed to the communications console. "All right, Uhura, let's try that relay."

"Goodhope Colony, this is the Starship Enterprise. Do you read? Enterprise, calling Goodhope... "

Scott didn't realize that he had been holding his breath until a voice answered Uhura's call.

"Enterprise, this is Goodhope. May we assist you?"

Scott stepped closer and identified himself. "We have certain matters to discuss with you. May we come down?"

There was a pause, then the speaker said, "Hold, please. I shall get our leader."

"Diogenes." McCoy chewed at his lip. "He wouldn't dare refuse... "

"He'd be within his rights to do so," Scott reminded, "although it wouldnae be very polite."

"Or make much sense," Uhura mused. When the two men looked at her for explanation, she added, "Goodhope is founded on an open-door policy. Everyone is welcome, everyone is loved."

"How do you know so much about it?" McCoy asked her.

"I have a cousin down there," she told them. "I don't know Mufasta very well, but when my mother told me she had gone there following a man named Diogenes, I was curious enough to find out more. Everything I heard was very favorable," she concluded.

Before McCoy could form a reply, another voice came over the speaker. "Diogenes here. Welcome to Goodhope, Enterprise."

"Thank you, sir," Scott responded. "We're doing a routine check on the colonies in this sector, and we'd like to pay our respects to your staff. We'll be in orbit in three hours. May we have a few minutes of your time?"

There was a pause at the other end, then Diogenes spoke. "This is... quite unexpected. We've never had a starship call in four years. Is something wrong?"

"Oh, no, not at all," Scott assured, his voice smooth. "You're verra isolated, and we have a few routine forms to be filled out. We'll be beaming down - could you transmit the co-ordinates?"

There was another pause, longer this time, while Scott and McCoy each reflected how they would proceed if Diogenes balked and refused. The reply, however, was affirmative.

"Of course, Captain." Scott did not correct the impression. "I'll look forward to meeting with you. I'll give your ship the co-ordinates for my office. Diogenes out."

McCoy let out a breath. "Whew. That was easy enough. I'll go get my things ready."

"You take it for granted you'll be included," Scott fussed. "Aye, Doctor, 'tis your place to go. Ms. Uhura - do you care to see the magnetic Diogenes?" he challenged.

Her eyes twinkled. "I thought you'd never ask. But... how will we find the Captain and Mr. Spock?"

"We'll find 'em, lass. We'll find 'em."

* * * *

Scott, McCoy and Uhura materialized at the appointed time in front of the white building which contained Diogenes' office and quarters. Dusk was falling, and the surrounding area seemed nearly deserted. The absence of the colonists puzzled McCoy.

"Where is everyone?" He glanced around. As if on cue, the door to the house opened, and Caldin bounded down the steps.

"Welcome to Goodhope." His manner seemed less warm than his words. "Come inside, Diogenes is expecting you."

They entered the cool office, noting the spartan surroundings before their attention was drawn to the pale giant who was striding toward them.

"I am Diogenes," he stated simply, extending a hand.

Scott accepted the greeting. "Montgomery Scott, in command of the U.S.S. Enterprise. This is Dr. Leonard McCoy, our Chief Medical Officer, and Lieutenant Uhura, Senior Communications Officer."

Diogenes fixed his eyes on McCoy at the announcement of his rank, but made no comment. Instead, he indicated three chairs. "Sit down, please." He perched on the edge of his massive desk, giving him an advantage of height over them. "I must admit, your call took me by surprise. After four years of being virtually on our own, we were not expecting interference from Starfleet."

"Interference?" Scott picked up, as he took a seat. "Hardly that, sir. We've no wish to disrupt your colony. We're here for your benefit."

Diogenes caught the slip. "Forgive me. A poor choice of words. I did not mean to imply... what is it you *do* want?"

"Our ship is patrolling this sector. It's our job to run checks on all Federation colonies in the area..."

"Checks on what?" Diogenes' voice was abrupt, cutting in.

"Progress and development, potential, growth..."

"We file every six months." Again, Diogenes interrupted, his tone clipped.

Scott remained unruffled. "Aye, sir, that you do, but a personal visit can be a lot more beneficial and expedient than the red tape of reports and bureaucracy."

"We have no need of anything from the Federation." Diogenes dismissed the suggestion.

"Well, now," McCoy perused the room, "looks like you could use quite a few things, and we could make some recommendations ..."

Diogenes' eyes narrowed at McCoy. "We live a simple life in Goodhope, Doctor. Our people have no need of materialistic gain..."

"Where are your people?" McCoy broke in.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I didn't notice anyone around when we arrived. Our records show over a thousand citizens inhabit Goodhope."

"They are at work - in the fields, at construction sites, in the kitchens and labs. Ours is a laboring society. Our day starts early and ends late. There are few idle hours in our lives for mischief. My people find contentment in their labors. If you were expecting to find malingers, escapist from the demands and responsibilities of society, you came to the wrong place."

"Not at all." McCoy was surprised by the fervor in Diogenes' speech. "I was just remarking that it seemed strange to me to see no one about. It doesn't matter, though, I'll get to meet them, anyway. I want to run some physicals..."

"Physicals?" Diogenes' voice was sharp. "What in the galaxy for, Doctor? We have our own medical facilities in Goodhope."

"I'm sure you do," McCoy agreed. "And I'm anxious to see them. But we have reports to make."

"It's a routine thing," Scott assured quickly. "Part of the patrol mission of a starship."

Diogenes stood and walked around behind his desk. He seemed to be considering. Finally, he faced them. "I'm sorry, gentlemen. It's out of the question. I cannot permit it."

Scott shrugged. "I'm afraid it's not a request. You're under Federation jurisdiction..."

"For protection," Diogenes asserted. "I was guaranteed Federation *protection* when I settled Goodhope."

"Well, the Federation likes to know what it's protecting." Scott would not be dissuaded. "There's no problem, it's just routine, Mr. Diogenes."

"You keep using that word - routine ." The leader seemed to grow more agitated. "In the four years we've been here, we've never been interfered with by a starship." Again the inference slipped out. Scott and McCoy noticed it, but did not comment.

"The galaxy's a big place," Scott reasoned, "and there are only a few starships patrolling it. True, we don't get to visit all the settlements as often as we'd like."

Diogenes walked away from the desk and moved over to a small table. He poured himself a drink from the pitcher, his back to the visitors. Gulping down the contents of a cup, he then returned to the desk and sat down. When at last he spoke, his voice seemed calmer.

"Perhaps you don't understand the nature of Goodhope. These people have come here seeking a sanctuary from the injustices, the persecution of a society which failed to accept them as they are. Most suffered - through no fault of their own - because they were labeled different, unsuitable to live among what was considered normal people. I have given them a home. I will not allow them to be subjected to the prying, insensitive treatment of outsiders who long ago rejected them."

Uhura felt her throat constrict at the conviction in the man's words. "We try not to be insensitive. A starship encounters all manner of beings, from all walks of life. We are taught to see the beauty in each form and appreciate the individual uniqueness."

Diogenes seemed to notice her for the first time. "Perhaps you would understand Goodhope, Lieutenant. Unfortunately, your high-sounding words are not the truth of the Federation. Bigotry and prejudice do exist."

"Mr. Diogenes," Scott sighed, "we're not here to question your philosophy or intrude on your way of life. We merely want to take a look around, check on the colony's well-being, fill out some reports...."

"No!"

McCoy gauged the man clinically. "Why are you so opposed to this visit? If the colony is doing as well as you imply, you should take pride in your accomplishment. You could be an example to the rest of the Federation of what can be achieved by people who were thought to be outcasts."

"Pride?" Diogenes snapped. "A deceitful term! We have no wish to prove ourselves to anyone. We want only to be left alone in contentment."

"Nevertheless, you do invite new seekers. You do campaign for pilgrims all over the galaxy. You distribute literature, hold rallies."

"I spread my truth to all who have a need. My message is not meant for those with hatred in their hearts."

"I'd like to hear about Goodhope from the people themselves." McCoy's tone held a subtle challenge.

"You have spoken to me. I am the voice of Goodhope."

Before McCoy could answer, the door to the office opened and a young woman entered. She stopped suddenly, seeing the Starfleet officers.

"I'm... I'm sorry. I didn't know there was someone here.. "

Diogenes flashed a warm smile and stood. "Come in, Leiis. It's all right, don't be afraid." He moved toward her and put an arm around her shoulders. "These are officers from a Starship." The girl seemed nervous, "This is Leiis, one of our devoted workers," he introduced.

Scott and McCoy started to rise, but Diogenes drew her attention away from them. "What is it you wanted, my dear?"

"Argus was working on the school, but I was sure he was supposed to be on the clearing crew. I came up to check the assignment sheets Jim made up."

The Enterprise officers caught the name, but held their reaction. Diogenes didn't seem to notice, but Leis turned quickly toward them. She met McCoy's eyes for a second, then looked away.

"The work day is nearly over," Diogenes was saying. "Let him stay where he is for now. You can straighten it out in the morning."

Leis nodded and without looking at the visitors again, hurried out. Diogenes turned back to them. "As you can see, the presence of outsiders makes my people nervous. Now, I suggest you go back to your starship, fill out whatever reports you need, and leave Goodhope to me."

Scott stood, refusing dismissal. "You dinnae understand. We represent the Federation, and Goodhope is a Federation colony. We have a job to do and we're verra conscientious about doin' our jobs." His words carried the hint of threat.

Diogenes drew himself up to his full height. He looked huge. "Mr. Scott, I have been more than patient with you. I have given you more time than I have to spare. In Goodhope, I am the power and the authority. My decisions stand."

Scott matched the leader's stance. "Mr. Diogenes, a Federation starship is in orbit to investigate your colony. We'll be back in the morning with teams to conduct that investigation. I strongly suggest that you co-operate."

Diogenes' eyes looked wild. "We are prepared to resist this invasion... !" He stopped abruptly, seeming aware of his outburst.

Scott peered at him. "I seriously hope you'll reconsider that action."

The leader took a breath. "We are a long way from a Federation headquarters."

"Aye, that we are." Scott motioned to McCoy and Uhura. They headed for the door. "Till the mornin', sir. We'll try to make this as simple as possible."

* * *

Back in Sickbay, the three officers discussed the meeting. McCoy fumed. "He's hiding something. Damn! We should go in right now."

Scott frowned. "Perhaps, but we'll give him a few hours to think it over. He's a bit puffed up, but he dinnae seem totally unreasonable."

Uhura was thoughtful. "That girl mentioned Jim... the Captain?"

"Maybe..." McCoy was analysing what had taken place. "She was certainly scared of something."

"It could be as Diogenes said." Scott rubbed his chin. "Maybe these colonists are timid with outsiders."

"Or maybe they're afraid of Diogenes. Damn, I wish we knew where Jim and Spock are."

"Doctor, we can locate them by their transponders, but it won't tell us anything unless you feel we should pull them up out of there."

McCoy faced the dilemma. "I'd like to, Scotty, but, hell... if they're all right... I wish we'd have seen more..."

"I'll do whatever you think best, Leonard." Scott was troubled. "Say the word and they're back on the ship."

The three officers looked at each other. McCoy made up his mind. "Scan for them, Scotty."

Scott moved to give the order, when the intercom buzzed.

"Message from Goodhope, Mr. Scott," the voice came over the speaker.

"Put them on."

"Enterprise, this is Goodhope. Diogenes says he will arrange for you to visit with some of the colonists in the morning, but requests that you delay beaming down until you hear from him."

Scott didn't reply at once, his eyes questioning McCoy. The doctor frowned. "It's not what we asked for."

"But it's more than he agreed to when we left."

McCoy sighed and nodded. Scott pressed the transmit button. "Tell Diogenes we'll be waiting for his call. Enterprise out." He threw a worried look at the others. "Will a few more hours make so much difference?"

"I hope not, Scotty. I hope not."

Chapter Fifteen

Far below, in a tiny cabin in Goodhope Colony, the objects of the Enterprise's concern were oblivious to the ship's presence. Kirk had moved Spock to the couch on the first floor, where it was cooler during the heat of the day. All afternoon, Spock had alternated periods of lucidity with moments of delirium. The fever was so high Kirk feared he would go into convulsions.

The stomach cramps were nearly unendurable. Spock, who normally could master his pain to an extent no Human could, was victim to paroxysms of violent agony. No medication seemed to touch the pain.

It was an ongoing battle to keep fluids in his system. He was constantly thirsty, and nothing would stay down. Water was offered repeatedly to prevent dehydration. Kirk tried hard not to give in to despair, to keep his raging impulse for action under control. Desperate, he had no where to turn, nor could he leave Spock's side.

"... Jim...?" The croaking whisper claimed his attention. He knelt by the side of the couch.

"I'm here, Spock... right here," he calmed, wiping the fresh beads of moisture from the Vulcan's face and neck.

"Where... " Spock's fever-bright eyes took in his surroundings. "... still... Goodhope," he mumbled.

Kirk held the ever-present cup to his lips. "Try to drink this," he instructed. "The ice is all gone -I'll get more in a little while." The frozen chips were easier for Spock to consume and seemed to stay down better, but ice was in short supply with all the feverish colonists.

Spock propped himself on an elbow and drank greedily. His tongue and throat were swollen, and swallowing was difficult and painful. He managed a few gulps and drew his head back. "... Enough... "

Kirk put down the cup and eased him back against the cushions. It made him ache to see the Vulcan suffer so terribly. Two days of the fever had physically wrung Spock of strength and will. He was slipping, Kirk knew, slipping away from him, and Kirk could do nothing to prevent it.

"... I can't... *be* like people here..." Spock murmured chaotically. "... Must be... myself... look at... data... clinically... the results are... never... Jim...!"

"Yes - yes, Spock?" Kirk took his hand, pressed the hot, damp flesh firmly.

"... good to... allow... some feelings... some..." His eyes focused on Kirk, a gentle pleading reflecting his distress.

"I know," Kirk said softly, understanding. "It's all right. I've always known."

"... You are the best..." Spock didn't, couldn't finish. He grimaced as the pain sliced through him.

"Oh, God..." Kirk drew him close, ready to cry with frustration and agony. "God, please ... we'll make it, Spock. Just hang on. We'll make it. We'll get to the ship and Bones will know what to do..."

If Spock understood his words, it was not apparent. He clung weakly to Kirk, his fingers picking at Kirk's sleeve.

"... Belonging... important to... everyone... Vulcan doesn't..."

"No, no... take it easy - relax," Kirk told him tenderly.

He realized that he could wait no longer to gain access to the transmitter. Even calling the ship now, he wasn't sure if Enterprise would reach them in time to save Spock's life, but he had to try.

As the Vulcan lapsed into a fretful sleep, he considered various plans of action. Deep in thought, he nearly missed the faint tapping at the door. When he realized that someone was there, he crossed quickly and threw the latch.

"Jim...! Jim, I must talk to you ... to somebody... !" Leiis stood, pressed against the doorframe, her hair tousled, her eyes wild and frightened.

Kirk took her arm and pulled her inside the cabin, closing the door firmly. "Leiis... what is it? What's wrong?"

Her gaze darted frantically about the room, then rested on Kirk, pleading. "It's... past curfew," she faltered, then went on. "I'm so confused, and I..."

"All right, take it easy." Kirk put his hands on her shoulders. "Here - sit down." Gently, he led her to the table and guided her into one of the chairs. Taking a seat opposite her, he asked, "What's happened?"

She had seemed to calm slightly under his influence. Shivering, she folded her hands on the table.

"Re-remember when we talked the other day? You... you told me that Diogenes was... was dangerous." She seemed to choke on the word. "No... it cannot be true... it cannot... but it is... it... Jim, he must be sick, he must..."

"Leiis, calm down and tell me - " Kirk began. She reached across the table and gripped his hand.

"Today - tonight - just a little while ago, officers came... from a starship. Starfleet..."

Kirk's mind leaped with surprise, followed by elation. They were here! *God, Bones, you've done it again, bless you!* In his excitement, he squeezed her hand, relief flooding him. Then he realized she was still speaking.

"Diogenes is like a madman. Jim, I'm scared. He refused to let them into the colony. They said they'd be back in the morning. Later, after they left, I listened... he was talking to Caldin. He wants to ... ~~kill~~ them! He told Caldin... he couldn't let them find out... the two of them were making plans... horrible plans... "

Kirk's stomach folded in on itself. Damn, the landing party would be walking into an ambush. "We have to warn the ship... " he stated flatly.

"Jim, where do you fit into this?" Leiis lifted her tear-streaked face to his. "When the officers were here, I... " she stared back down at the table, "I touched the mind of one of them. I know it's wrong, but I had to know... your name was there. I felt it."

Kirk decided to be honest. "Those people are my friends, Leiis. I told you that I came here to learn the truth. You must believe me, because I need your help."

The sound of coughing distracted him. Kirk was at the couch instantly, supporting Spock until the spasm had passed. Leiis had followed, and stood behind him.

"Spock is very ill," she observed sadly. "Just like Sufo and Dani."

In one motion, Kirk stood and turned, gripping her arms fiercely. "Yes - just like Sufo and Dani! And he'll die - like they died - unless I can get him the medical help he needs! Leiis, don't you see - can't you... "

"...Jim...?" Spock's voice was weak but lucid.

Kirk turned his attention away from the girl and back to his friend. Calming, he sat beside the Vulcan and rested a hand on his shoulder.

"Yes, Spock?"

"... who... you were talking? I heard... voices...?"

"Leiis is here, Spock." Kirk debated how much to tell the sick man. "We're going to have to go out for a while - will you be all right here by yourself?"

"Go... where?" Spock, even weak with the fever, was immediately suspicious. "Jim... no more... trouble... "

Leiis stared at them, then drew herself up straight as if making a decision.

"I will help you." Her voice was stronger, calmer.

Kirk glanced at her in gratitude, then looked back at the Vulcan. "There's no time to explain it all now, but everything's going to be all right. I won't be gone long."

"I... cannot... stop you." Spock closed his eyes in resignation. From behind closed lids, he murmured, "Please... be careful."

Kirk pressed his shoulder and stood. To Leiis, he spoke quietly, authoritatively. "Come. Let's go."

* * * *

They kept to the shadows, avoiding the monitors, and spoke in whispers. Kirk felt the adrenalin flowing; he was in charge again, taking the lead, planning, moving. He explained to Leiis that she must get Diogenes out of the house, lure him away on some pretext, allowing Kirk to slip upstairs and locate the communications console.

She nodded thoughtfully. "Yes... I can do that. Anything else?"

"Just get him away, then go back to my cabin and lock the door. We won't be in any danger. My friends will arrive within minutes, but I don't want you caught in the middle."

"What will they do - when they get here?" she worried.

"They'll take care of the sick. They'll find a cure."

He knew she was thinking of Diogenes, but she didn't press. Instead, she changed the subject. "I didn't realize that you and Spock were... so close. It's a beautiful thing, your caring."

Her words caught him off-guard. "I don't know what I'd do without him," he said simply. Almost casually, he added, "Spock is a telepath, you know."

Her eyes reflected her surprise. "He is?"

"All Vulcans have touch-telepathy. I told you it was nothing to fear."

They had reached the house. They stood in the shadows and Leis was very still. "Perhaps ... someday... I could experience such... devotion, then."

Kirk took her in his arms, gently, as one would a child. "You have the rest of your life, Leis, and it can be good, it can be beautiful."

Slowly, he bent up her chin and leaned over her, brushing her lips with his own. He felt the quickening of her heart and she clung to him for a long moment before stepping back.

"I'll hurry..." she promised. Without looking back, she scampered up the front steps.

* * * *

Leis did not pause to contemplate what she was doing. She knew only that she must do this. Jim needed her, in a special way that no one else ever had. Later, when it was over, Diogenes would understand. Diogenes was wise and good and he cared for his own, always... always.

She burst into the office and rushed up the darkened stairs, calling his name. The urgency in her voice, the suppressed sobs were not faked; they came easily.

"Leis...?" The leader stood at the top of the steps. The light behind him reflected his silhouette.

"Oh, Diogenes, please... come quickly." She faced him. "I've just come from the infirmary and Dr. Towers needs you immediately."

Diogenes seemed to sag. "Not tonight..." he groaned. "What is it, Leis?"

"The doctor thinks he's found a cure, and he needs your permission to administer it. And there are several patients who need your presence... please, it's critical..." Leis took a deep breath and tried to steady herself.

With an enormous effort of will, Diogenes gathered his control and nodded. "Very well. Let's go."

As they hurried down the path toward the infirmary, Leis stole a sidelong glance at the man by her side. Their beloved leader was dirty, his clothes stained with sweat, his hair uncombed. His face was drawn and haggard, and she suddenly suspected that Diogenes was an older man than he seemed to appear. Her heart tore with love and compassion for him.

I am not betraying Diogenes... I am not! she reflected wildly. *Surely what I am doing will ultimately be best for him.*

She had lagged a few paces behind. Diogenes paused and waited for her to catch up. With a gesture of comfort, he put an arm around her shoulders as they continued.

"My poor Leis..." he murmured. "You have suffered much these past days..."

Her stomach turned over with guilt, and she could not look at him. They rounded a corner on the path, and Leis noticed a lone figure walking in their direction. As they converged, she recognized Bereth.

Diogenes hailed him. "Bereth! What is this I hear - Gordon has isolated the cure!"

The scientist drew close to them and shot the leader a puzzled frown. "What? Where did you hear that? I just came from the infirmary."

For a moment, Diogenes was confused. "He sent for me... "

"I don't think so... " Bereth seemed to consider. "As a matter of fact, Dr. Towers is getting ready to close up. That's why he sent me home."

"But... " Diogenes faced suddenly filled with dawning awareness. He looked down at Leis, his eyes narrowing. "Damn you!" he spat, all the hate and venom in him contained in those two words.

Leis quivered under the attack of emotion and he read the truth in her eyes. For an instant she thought he would strike her. Instead, he shoved her toward Bereth.

"Keep her here! It has to be Kirk. She's given him time to find the transmitter... " Quickly, Diogenes spun on his heel and ran back toward the house.

Bereth, totally confused, held Leis tightly by the arms. Her guilt had been replaced by fear and she struggled in his grip.

"Please - let me go! Bereth - release me! He's going to kill Jim Kirk! I can't let him -"

"Leis... what's going on?" Bereth was clearly terrified.

"I can't explain... " she managed to free one arm and began to pummel him with her fist. "Let me go!"

Dumbfounded, he released her, watching as she raced after Diogenes, who had disappeared. Bereth had no idea whether or not to follow her. Diogenes' ominous words echoed in his mind. '*... It has to be Kirk...*' Whatever was happening, one thing was certain - they were in trouble up at the house. Perhaps it was none of his business, but Caldin must know. With newfound purpose, and a need to be rid of the responsibility for decision, Bereth headed for the cabin occupied by Caldin.

* * * *

The upper story of the house was awash with light, Kirk discovered. Both rooms were fully visible, and he paused, trying to decide where to begin his search. It was cooler up here, and Kirk realized that the generator was used by Diogenes for his personal comfort. Lighting, temperature control - even an electronic musical system.

He began in the kitchen. Books and papers scattered under his fingers. A cabinet in the far corner, he discovered, was locked. Frustration mounting, he smashed the wooden casing.

A pull-down shelf contained the object he sought. An audible sound of relief escaped Kirk. *At last... the console...*

Like everything else in Goodhope, it was an old model, but the lead wires were hooked up and it appeared to be functional.

Suddenly and without warning, there was the sound of running footsteps. Kirk stood and turned, startled by the intrusion.

Diogenes burst into the room, his eyes filled with loathing, a crazed look on his face. In his hand, a phaser was aimed at Kirk's midsection.

"I should have killed you when I had the chance!"

Kirk lifted his chin. "Then, you'd better do it now, because it's the only way you'll keep me from using this console."

Abruptly, Diogenes moved the weapon and fired past Kirk. Kirk whirled to see the console sputter and burn. He swung around to face Diogenes.

"Do you realize what you've done? You *are* insane!" The phaser was aimed at him again.

Diogenes smiled, a grimace of perverted pleasure. "I have prevented your interference once and for all. Just as I will stop anyone who tries to oppose me."

"Diogenes, you can't do this - you can't possibly succeed." Kirk attempted reason. "What will you do? Tackle Starfleet single-handedly?"

"By what rank shall I address you? Commander?" Diogenes regarded him speculatively, a faint mocking tone in his voice. "Did Leiis tell you that a ship was here today? That precious starship you kept insisting was nearby?"

Kirk's thinly controlled rage sharpened his words. "*My* ship. The Enterprise. I'm her Captain."

Diogenes inclined his head slightly, still mocking. Then he glared. "Captain Kirk - a truly dishonest man - a man who would sell his own soul. You are the most despicable example of Federation treachery and indecency I've ever encountered. You -- "

Leiis' arrival was heralded by the sound of her clattering footsteps. She flew into the room, panic-stricken and shaken.

"Diogenes - no! Don't -- "

The leader did not remove his eyes, or the phaser, from Kirk, but fury seemed to consume him anew.

"Leiis ... " he intoned, "you would chose to be a part of this? You would betray Goodhope, blaspheme against me, for *this*...?"

"Diogenes, please... I beg you! Jim only wants to help Goodhope... "

"Don't beg him, Leiis." Kirk's voice was cold and hard with contempt. "He doesn't care what you - or anyone - thinks. He never has."

"That's not true, Jim!" Leiis came to Kirk's side, ignoring the phaser. "You don't know..."

"Leiis, come to me!" Diogenes ordered. "Stand away from him."

She faced the leader. "Why? So you can... *kill*? I've been blind - *you* blinded me, but now I *see* again. I see with my mind - I hear - "

Leiis was becoming hysterical and Kirk feared for her safety. She was vulnerable; everything she had believed in had been taken from her.

"All those people... " she continued. "My friends... sick, dying... why don't you *help* them? Why do you refuse... "

"Leiis... " Kirk interrupted, "go away. Leave here while you can -- "

"I commanded you!" Diogenes roared. "Leiis Indesta, you will be punished. You will see your wickedness... "

There was a popping noise like an explosion behind Diogenes. To Kirk's horror, he saw flames begin to lick at the bookshelves.

"No!" she screamed. "No more... punishment! No more... wickedness! I... cannot... " Several smaller pops punctuated her speech. The room filled with smoke. The furnishings began to burn.

Diogenes was taken as much by surprise as Kirk. He spun around, taking in the destruction behind him. Kirk seized the opportunity and tackled him, knocking the bigger man to the floor.

The phaser slipped beyond the grasp of either man. They wrestled, only dimly aware of the string of explosions around the room. Leiis' power was out of control, threatening to engulf them all in fire.



Kirk struggled, no match for the giant Diogenes. Smoke threatened to overcome him. His eyes and throat burned with it. The unequal contest seemed to go on forever, as Kirk fought with the fury of a man who could lose everything. Then, he was overcome. Diogenes pushed him against the smoldering couch, and the heat against his arm forced him to release his grip on the leader. Off-balanced, Kirk was not prepared for the stunning blow to his midsection.

He tried to move and found he couldn't. He could barely draw a breath into searing lungs. Diogenes towered over him, his watering eyes raging, his voice barely a croak.

"Die - here. Ashes are a fitting... end!" Unsteadily, Diogenes turned and started for the doorway.

Halfway there, a ceiling beam gave way and crashed, burning, to the floor, pinning Diogenes beneath it.

Kirk heard the almost inhuman howl of pain and terror, and he forced himself to move, to rise. Stumbling, trying to keep below the smoke, he crawled toward the fallen man, now so ominously still and quiet.

"Diogenes..." Kirk coughed, choking. He tugged desperately at the heavy timber, but it was useless. The leader was beyond his help, and Kirk knew that if he didn't get out himself, he would succumb to the smoke. His thoughts chaotically recalled the image of the man weeping for Sufo D'Tin.

Leiis, forgotten in the struggle and confusion, was still standing where they had left her. As Kirk turned, he suddenly remembered and made a move toward her. For an instant she stood, her face so vacant of expression that Kirk thought she had gone into a trance - or was mad. Then, without the familiar popping, Leiis Indestra began to burn. Her dark hair sent new sparks flying into the conflagration. Her body was instantly consumed by flame, and she neither cried out nor seemed aware. The corpse twitched, upright, then fell to the floor, sparks shooting in all directions.

Kirk felt the black bile rise in his throat as he tried, without success, to scream. Her name came out a whisper.

"Leiis..."

Stumbling, choking, he reached the doorway. The hallway and staircase were dense with smoke, but he propelled himself forward, lurching, sliding down the narrow steps.

Outside at last, he took in as much of the fresh air as his abused lungs would allow. Too shaken to go farther, he sat heavily on the front steps to regain his equilibrium.

Dimly, he realized that lanterns were going on all across the colony, and there were the sounds of rushing feet and a stabbing light coming toward him. From the darkness, Caldin and Bereth emerged.

"DI - O - GENEES!!!" Caldin mounted the steps, sheer panic on his face.

Kirk stood, realizing his intent, and barred his path. "Caldin - no! It's too late."

"No - " The man struggled as Kirk restrained him. "No - I've got to get to him! Let me go!"

"It's no use! He's dead, Caldin! You can't get up there..."

Caldin went rigid under his hands, every fiber of his being denying Kirk's harsh words. The fire had spread to the first floor, and they could see the flames licking out behind them. Forcefully, Kirk dragged him off the porch and away from the burning house. It was then that Caldin's numbness wore off and he sagged against Kirk with a roar from somewhere deep inside him.

"My life... my love... Diogenes... Diogenes... you can't leave me..."

Kirk held him tightly, trying to comfort, to console the most terrifying grief he had ever witnessed. His own sense of desolation intensified under the onslaught of Caldin's emotion.

Bereth came up to them, his eyes raking coldly over Kirk. "I'll take care of him. Goodhope takes care of its own."

Kirk released the sobbing Caldin to Bereth without a word. But the young scientist lost his tone of authority when he took Caldin against him.

"What shall we do? What shall we all do without him? Caldin, Caldin... how shall we exist?"

"You'd better start by putting out that fire," Kirk observed. "Organize your people..." The two men, however, paid him no attention.

Colonists with lanterns were beginning to hurry toward the house. The sound of voices was swelling, and all Goodhope was in confused chaos. Kirk's immediate thought was that he must get to Spock, before the Vulcan was made aware of what had happened. Thinking of his friend, Kirk felt some of the tension lift a little, as if a clear path had been lit in his mind, that single thought a beacon of promise.

Getting to his own cabin was not as easy as it seemed. The pathways were choked with colonists, all heading toward the burning house. Word was filtering down from the first to arrive that their leader was dead, and fear and panic was growing. People stopped to sit down and cry, some blocking the ever-forward procession. Some went running blindly for the house, bumping over children and old people. Kirk was stopped repeatedly to be asked the same questions in halting, frightened tones.

Once, it was Leander. The tall, slim human, clad only in a pair of sleeping shorts, grabbed Kirk by the arm.

"Jim - is it true? Where is Diogenes? What happened?"

"The main house is on fire - they need people to man the hoses. Go help, Leander," Kirk told him.

The fingers dug more deeply into his flesh. "But... where is Diogenes?"

"He was... in the house. I'm sorry."

As with Caldin, the truth shocked Leander. He let his hands fall to his sides and began to whimper. "No... no..."

At last Kirk reached his own cabin. He had seen the door to every cabin standing open, but he was shocked to find his, too, ajar.

* * * *

Somewhere, people were shouting. A word clarified in Spock's dawning consciousness. *Fire...* He nodded lethargically, accepting the proclamation. The fever's own fire consumed him and it was all an illusion, a dream-image of noise and urgent calls.

Then the trained-Vulcan part of his mind took over and he struggled for full awareness, separating what was outside from what was within. And *something* definitely was happening outside.

A hand shoved open the unlocked door of the cabin. Groggy, Spock sat up. The anonymous figure paused only a moment before rushing away.

"Fire - up at the main house!"

Spock felt a shiver wash over his sweat-soaked body. His vision dimmed. The main house. And Jim had gone out with... Leis, he remembered. They were out there, and if what Spock suspected were true, they had gone to find the transmitter.

I must find him - I must... Spock's thoughts skidded abruptly to a halt. He could do nothing of the sort in his present condition and he knew it. Even standing seemed an impossible task.

I must try. The noise was further away now, moving, he presumed, toward the main section of the colony. He leaned forward, supporting his weight on his arms and sought to control his heartbeat and respiration.

For several minutes he sat that way, gradually mastering his body with his mind. Sweat slaked off, rolling down his arms and legs, but he did not notice. His stomach cramped; he ignored it. At last he felt ready to attempt movement.

He stood, unconscious of his near-nakedness and crossed stiffly, slowly, to the opened door. He was pouring out a tremendous amount of psychic will, but the toll would be exacted later, and now was when he needed to act.

Weakly, he sagged against the wall, then gathered his control to continue. He reached the door just as another figure blotted out the opening.

"Jim!" Relief coursed through him as he beheld the wonderful, grimy, soot-streaked image of his Captain. Spock stood straighter, sensing from the tense, hunched figure that his own strength would be needed. "What... happened?"

Kirk seemed startled to see him up, but the surprise quickly faded, replaced by gratitude. Wordlessly, Kirk leaned against him, resting not so much his weight as an invisible burden too heavy to bear. Spock smelled the strong odor of smoke, saw the blisters on his hand, the bruises darkening along the side of his jaw. He pulled the Human closer.

"Diogenes is dead." Kirk's voice was flat, controlled. "And Leis..."

The words astounded the Vulcan. He had not anticipated this news. "How did it happen?"

Kirk pulled away and his eyes were suddenly concerned. "You shouldn't be up. What were you trying to do?"

"I heard the commotion..."

"Diogenes' house is on fire." Kirk wiped a hand over his face, streaking the dirt with his sweat.

Spock's control began to falter. He realized that he would have to sit down or he would fall and make a mockery of his effort. Unsteadily, he started for the couch.

A strong arm banded his waist, taking the bulk of his weight in a protective hold. With Kirk's help, he attained his destination and sat heavily.

"Lie down..." Kirk urged.

"I am all right for the moment. Jim..." He reached out for the other's blistered hand. "Tell me."

"Leis'... power went out of control. She... broke under a divided loyalty." In halting tones, Kirk told him everything. It was a dry, emotionless report, one such as the Vulcan himself would have given. "Goodhope is in chaos," he concluded. "Nobody seems to know what to do, and the Enterprise won't return until tomorrow morning at the earliest."

"Jim - it was not your fault." Spock knew his friend's thoughts, could sense his underlying need to express them. "The flaws were there, within the man, before we ever arrived."

"He didn't need to die."

"No one ever does."

Kirk looked at him, a penetrating gaze, then he stood. "I've got to help them. Will you be all right?"

No, Spock wanted to tell him. *No - stay with me. Talk to me...* Aloud he said, "I shall accompany you."

"Don't be ridiculous. You couldn't even get across the room." His open palm pressed against Spock's forehead. "You're burning up. I don't know how you're managing to control the effects of the fever, but it won't last."

Spock stiffened and pulled away from his touch. "Jim, whatever has happened tonight, whatever will happen, I, too, am a part of it. My body is under control now, and I cannot simply lie here."

Kirk regarded him for a moment, then nodded. "Perhaps you're right. Let's go."

* * * *

The events of that long night would remain forever etched in their minds. Death and destruction reigned in Goodhope Colony. When they arrived at the main section, they walked into the middle of a nightmare. The colonists had made no effort to extinguish the house, and its charred ruin lay collapsed upon itself, still smoking and smoldering. Some of the people had put torches to the Rotunda and a few nearby buildings, and now their added blaze lit up the night sky. A few of the more rational were struggling to quench the conflagration, but most of the colonists walked around trance-like, wailing and whimpering.

Kirk tried to talk to them, individually and collectively, but they paid him no attention.

In the clearing, where the colony ate, the long wooden tables contained the less mobile colonists. It was here that they found Caldin and Bereth, lying in a drying pool of blood, Caldin's hand still gripped the knife which had split open their throats.

Spock knelt beside the corpses as a sickening wave of agony washed over him. Bereth -- young, brilliant, scientifically gifted, had preferred death to a life outside Goodhope, a life without Diogenes. He touched the dead man's cheek. The lines from his tears had dried in the smoke soot. An illogical waste of life... The Vulcan shivered.

Kirk went to his knees, torn by sorrow and guilt. Caldin -- so loyal to Diogenes, so patient and understanding with his leader. He had been, perhaps, the only person in Goodhope who truly knew who and what Diogenes was, and now he could never tell them. *Damn you, he swore silently at the corpse. You should have stayed alive - to tell his story, to make the galaxy see that it was not a simple delienation of good and evil. Why was it necessary for you to take your own life? For the first time, you were truly free...*

Caldin's voice came back to haunt him, from a day that seemed a lifetime ago. *'Jim... do not betray him. For all our sakes...' Kirk trembled, his fingers clenching and unclenching around Spock's arm.*

"Captain..." Spock turned to face him. "We can do no more here. Shall we move on?"

Kirk met the mournful eyes. "Yes... are you feeling all right?"

"No... but I can manage." Grimly, Spock gained his feet, a pained expression etched on his face.

They moved away from the bodies. In the distance, they could see the infirmary. It seemed to be untouched, and Kirk wondered how many colonists inside, too ill with the fever to be aware, even knew what was happening outside the building. If the Enterprise found a cure in time, they could survive the holocaust of Goodhope. Ironically, the disease might be their salvation.

Together they returned to the Rotunda and helped organize the fire brigade. Many of the workers were the new colonists - Kirk recognized the names from his rosters. Perhaps, he considered, their attachment was less ingrained, their absorbtion into the colony incomplete.

There was a commotion over in the direction of the house. Hurrying to the scene, they discovered that several men had entered the ruins and somehow, they had managed to locate the charred body of Diogenes. When they arrived, Nars and two other men were arranging the funeral bier, fashioning it from wooden planks.

"Oh, my God..." Kirk wanted to turn from the sight, but he held himself erect. The Vulcan's hand closed on his shoulder.

They watched as Valla and another woman stepped forward and draped the body with silken cloth. Irrationally, Kirk wondered where, in Goodhope, they had found it. Around them, a crowd began to gather, as more and more of the colonists streamed to the site.

The wailing intensified, and then it took form. Someone began to chant, and the others picked up the poignantly one-sided litany.

"We are *loved* in Goodhope."

"We *belong* in Goodhope."

"No one is different here... " The voices faltered over the words, sobs mingling with speech.

Slowly, Nars and four others bore the planks upon their shoulders and moved toward the clearing. Kirk and Spock found themselves propelled along with the mob, marching in the bizarre cortege. Kirk caught his friend's eye, but there was nothing to say, nothing they could say.

Lanterns ringed the clearing, although dawn was inexorably breaking. The now-silent crowd circled the catafque - a wooden table. A lone voice began to sing, chilling them with mournful tones, a song of joy turned into a hymn of grief.

*"I've never had a home
Like this place before.
Never in my life, since the day I was born... "*

A man stepped forward, his body moving in time to the notes. Kirk recognized him. It was KimSoon, the oldest member of their circle group. As the Oriental raised his arms above his head, Kirk saw the gleam of metal in his hand. Swiftly, the hand plunged; KimSoon's body arched into the thrust.

"It's a knife! Spock - he's got a knife... "

"Jim -- " Spock pulled his attention away from KimSoon's falling figure. Kirk realized that all through the crowd, colonists were producing weapons, tools. With frenzied motions, people were taking their own lives. A few feet away, Kirk saw Valla take the knife from KimSoon's body and shove it roughly into her own heart.

"Valla - no!" Kirk sprang forward, fear propelling him.

She gazed bleakly at him, and the consummate grief in her expression chilled him. "We ... *choose*..." The statement hissed through her teeth.

Nars took his sister's body in his arms. "To live in a universe without Diogenes is unacceptable."

Kirk turned to find the Vulcan at his side. Around them the terrible wailing intensified. Blindly, Kirk lurched away, pulling Spock with him, away from the circle, away from the wooden table with its gruesome burden, away from the spectacle of a group gone mad, away from the deaths.

"No... more," he managed. "No more!"

* * * *

The lantern light still glowed in their cabin. Kirk slammed the door behind him, throwing the latch in an illogical effort to lock out the suffering and chaos of Goodhope Colony. Spock sagged against the doorframe, the effects of his psychic control beginning to weaken.

"Even in death..." Kirk shuddered, "they follow him... Despite everything he was, everything he did to them..."

Spock trembled, "What was he?" His knees buckled and he slid down the wall. He, too, felt the frustration, the consummate sorrow, but he could not express it.

"Oh, God... Spock!" Kirk knelt beside him and pulled the Vulcan close.

"Jim... they do not understand. They were bewitched by Diogenes, believed he was everything..."

"He did that to them. He made them believe it..."

"Is there... nothing we can do to stop them?"

Kirk shook his head. "You saw them. There's no reason, no sense in what they're doing, and still..." Spock took a breath, trying to concentrate, trying not to slip into sweet oblivion. Kirk needed him awake and yet the Captain, usually so perceptive about the Vulcan, seemed not to notice his discomfort. He made no move to rise from their position on the floor, continuing as he considered. "Spock, did it seem to you that many of them wanted to die? They seemed to prefer to end their life rather than face it without him."

Spock nodded against him. "Yes, Jim... without him they have nothing... they believe they are nothing."

Kirk shifted slightly, drawing Spock closer. "Not all of them. There are those who are dissatisfied, unconvinced. Some were dissenters like Anton, others just had doubts."

"Then, perhaps, they shall survive."

Abruptly, Kirk pulled away from Spock, dropping the Vulcan almost casually against the wall. He stood and crossed to the door, opening it and looking out. "There are fires all over Goodhope, the Rotunda, the shed... If they come this way, we'll have to be prepared to evacuate."

Spock tried to sit up from the awkward position and failed. "Jim, I'm not certain I could..." he began weakly from the floor. Kirk seemed to notice him and whirled, closing the door behind him.

"Oh, shit, look at you." He moved once more to Spock's side. "I'm sorry. You ought to be in bed." Carefully, he lifted Spock and helped him to the couch. "Don't worry, if we have to get out of here, I'll carry you." Spock seemed to have no strength of his own and he sagged as Kirk rather clumsily deposited him on the couch.

"That... may prove inconvenient," he managed.

Kirk looked a bit chagrined as he realized Spock was referring to his less-than-gentle treatment, then he met Spock's eyes and they smiled at each other, understanding.

"Well, Mr. Spock, I've never let lack of convenience be a deterrent," he admitted.

"I know," Spock answered, shutting his eyes. He felt the now-gentle hands settle him back against the pillow and straighten a blanket over him. "Jim," his voice was serious, "do you really think there is a danger that they will burn the cabins?"

Kirk pressed his palm against Spock's neck. It was still too hot. "I don't think so," he reassured. "The destruction seems to be turned inward against themselves. Can I get you anything? Some water?"

Spock shook his head. The room was spinning, the cramps were beginning again. He tried to control and found he had no power left on which to draw. He doubled his knees up; a short groan escaped through clenched teeth.

"Damn..." Kirk knew how bad the Vulcan's pain must be for him to lose control. Suddenly, Kirk dropped down to the floor beside the couch. Sitting crosslegged, he leaned his back against it and took his friend's hand. "Don't die on me, Spock. Please..." he whispered. He felt himself tremble with exhaustion. He was drained, emotionally and physically. He leaned his head back against Spock and shut his eyes. Faces floated unbidden before him - Leis, Caldin, Bereth, young Anton, Dr. Towers and Leander, their neighbors, Nars and Valla... Superimposed on all of them was a gentle, pale giant with yellow hair and probing green eyes. Diogenes - larger than life, accusing, demanding, compassionate, loving. He was all of those

things and more, and now he was gone. Havoc encompassed Goodhope - a mass without a leader, humanity without direction.

Diogenes stood before Kirk, his face, his words a challenge. *'You think you know what Goodhope is... I have given them purpose, a place and a home...'* "

What made you different? Kirk demanded. What made them follow you, worship you? What power did you have to direct lives, that men and women gave up everything and believed you? You were ruthless, cruel, yet you had only to speak and they listened. You had only to demand, and they obeyed.

Questions - so many of them that he knew he would never answer satisfactorily. The image of Diogenes taunted, seeming to mock him.

"... Without me, they are nothing. Without me, they cannot exist..."

Poor, blinded, misled people, craving love, needing a sense of belonging... and to think, Kirk realized grimly, that Goodhope - Diogenes - was all the galaxy had to offer them."

Weary beyond belief, Kirk's eyes closed and his head slumped toward his chest. The night had exacted its toll from him and he sank deeply into oblivion.

Chapter Sixteen

A landing party, which consisted of medical and sociological teams plus a heavy security contingent, materialized in the exact spot they had the day before.

When they had failed to hear from Diogenes by 0800, a fretting McCoy had urged that they contact the colony again. He had remembered the leader's words - 'Our day begins early...' , and was beginning to suspect that they were being put off by the reluctant host.

The transmission met with silence, as though the receiver on the other end was dead. Without hesitation, Scott ordered the standing-by teams to the transporter room. They would wait no longer to appease Diogenes.

The scene which greeted them spurred them into action immediately. Dead bodies were everywhere. Every building in the main section was either smoking or a mass of rubble. Those who had survived the madness of the night appeared to be walking around as if in a trance. To the landing party, it seemed as if some terrible, natural calamity had wreaked havoc on the colony, but a natural disaster did not account for the self-inflicted wounds on the corpses, or the knives and axes around which cold fingers were still curled.

McCoy damned himself for not having insisted that they monitor the colony during the night, for having been placated against his instincts by the smooth-talking Diogenes. Had they not all been wooed into trust by the man's dynamic force, they might have prevented whatever tragedy had occurred.

He tried to talk to the shuffling, vacant-eyed survivors, but no one seemed capable of speech, or else his questions provoked fits of hysterical weeping. He could learn neither what had happened nor the whereabouts of Kirk and Spock. Desperately fearful for the safety of his friends, he contacted the ship and told Scotty to locate them by the transponders.

Awaiting the co-ordinates, he and Sulu crossed to what had been the clearing, and it was there that they found the largest congestion of survivors, clustered around a table which contained the remains of the leader, Diogenes.

One of his medics came up to report that an infirmary was full of desperately ill patients, some near death, and all afflicted with raging fevers. Impatiently, McCoy waited for Scott's

reply. Goodhope a disaster, some sort of epidemic - in what condition would he find Kirk and Spock in the midst of all this?

* * * *

Kirk awoke with a start. It seemed he had only dozed for a moment, but a quick glance at the chronometer told him it was 0820.

He rubbed viciously at his eyes with a fist and stood up. The landing party was returning this morning - they should be here soon, if he knew McCoy and Scott. He had to get to the clearing immediately. He was halfway to the door before his mind completely awoke and he remembered.

"Spock... " He turned back to the couch, nearly stumbling in his haste. "Spock - no!"

The Vulcan was lying as he had left him, his body perfectly motionless, his skin as pale as ivory. Kirk had not meant to sleep, had not meant to leave him unattended.

Kirk's knees quivered and he knelt quickly before he fell, searching desperately for some sign of life in the still form.

A sound from behind caught his attention. As he turned, the door opened and McCoy, Sulu, and a security guard rushed in.

Kirk was too upset, his nerves too frayed, to even feel relief. Anxiously, he turned back to the Vulcan, trying to rouse him.

"Bones... help him... "

The doctor was at his side instantly, before Kirk had even spoken. "My God, Jim, what happened down here?" McCoy ran the mediscanner as he spoke.

"Diogenes was killed." Kirk's gaze never left the Vulcan, his heart racing with fear.

"We found his body." McCoy shot a hypospray against Spock's arm. Despite his curiosity and the shock of what he had found in Goodhope, all his attention focused on the ill First Officer.

Spock's labored breathing became more rapid and Kirk watched with relief as the Vulcan's eyes fluttered open. Kirk gripped McCoy's arm for support and seemed to sag, then he caught himself and related briefly what he knew about the illness.

The doctor stilled Spock's feeble movements by pressing him back against the cushions. He spoke with urgent haste. "Complete disorientation from the fever, and a major breakdown of the life processes. I'll get him up to the ship and on support mechanisms immediately." He turned around, and for the first time seemed to notice Kirk's state of health - the burns, the bruises, the signs of complete exhaustion. "You too, Jim. You're coming with us, now. I'll have to quarantine you both until we isolate the microbes."

Kirk began to tremble. The ordeal was finally over, his ship was here. They could go home. His legs buckled and McCoy grabbed him to keep him from falling. The doctor guided him to a chair and sat him down. Kirk looked up at his friend.

"Bones, you were here yesterday. Why did you leave? What took you so long to return?"

McCoy shifted uncomfortably. "I... I don't know, Jim. We spoke to Diogenes. I didn't trust him. I was afraid something might be wrong... and yet... yet, we waited... because he asked us to... no, told us... and somehow, we listened to him, as if we wanted to believe him... no, that's not right, either..." McCoy was almost stammering, unable to explain. "Oh, hell, I don't know, Jim. I only met him for a few minutes, and yet..."

Kirk put his face in his hands. "Never mind, Bones. It's okay."

McCoy was still troubled. "There was something about the man."

"Yes." Kirk's voice was quiet. "There *was* something about the man."

The doctor put a hand on his friend's shoulder. With the other, he pulled out his communicator. "Three to beam up. Isolation procedures."

Epilogue

The Enterprise stayed in orbit for nearly three weeks, while additional help arrived. When the figures were in, Kirk had learned that 632 people were dead, and six more succumbed to the plague before a cure was isolated. Over 400 survived, but nearly all of them seemed to be suffering from varying degrees of shock and had to be removed to rehab centers, where they might be helped to cope with readjustment. Starfleet had arranged for their transportation, and ordered the site of the colony closed down.

The mop-up operation had occupied a large task force of Enterprise personnel, and Kirk had assumed command as soon as McCoy released him from quarantine. He had handled the business from the ship, though, and it was not until today, with their departure only hours away, that he had beamed down to make the final check in person.

The sight of the bleak landscape had unnerved him. Where once a thriving colony had stood, where over a thousand people had lived and loved and belonged, there was now only rubble. He materialized in what had been the dining area, the clearing where so many happy assemblies had taken place. The benches and serving tables had been removed and the dirt turned over. Gazing around, it looked as if Goodhope Colony had never existed.

Ensign Palmer came up to him. "Captain - section five is secure. We're the last, sir."

"All right, Ensign. Prepare your team. We'll beam up in twenty minutes."

As Palmer departed, Kirk heard the whine of materialization behind him. Turning, he saw the form coalesce into the familiar outline of his First Officer.

"Spock - what are you doing down here?" Kirk was concerned. Spock had been released from Sickbay only two days ago, and still remained on light-duty status. Although McCoy assured Kirk that Spock would suffer no lasting damage from the illness, the Vulcan was still thin and gaunt, and Kirk felt a need to protect him.

"Sir, the Reliever and the Lincoln have just left orbit. These reports need your initials." He handed Kirk a clipboard.

"And you, too, felt compelled to return." Steadily, Kirk met his eyes. "I understand. And I'm glad you're here," he added quickly. He turned, to stare out toward the hills, where he had walked that night when Anton Law had been caught stirring a rebellion against Diogenes.

"Jim..." Spock moved closer. "We must let go of it. We came here to do a job, and that mission is now over."

Kirk looked at him, skeptical. "You don't believe that any more than I do. We can't forget that easily. It's not an abstract equation. Some of those people who died were our friends. And, Spock, I keep wondering. Did we betray them? Are we to blame for what happened here?"

"The seeds of destruction were present before we arrived. The epidemic would have occurred, the dissenters were here. How far would the colonists have followed Diogenes before enough people rallied to put an end to his tyranny?"

Kirk considered. "Yet, for so many to follow him into death..." he shook his head. "In

the long run, I suppose it was their own insecurity which brought about their destruction. They were doomed as long as they allowed themselves to be manipulated, depending on someone else to govern their lives."

"Perhaps," Spock responded, "our being here brought things to a conclusion more swiftly, more dramatically, but the ultimate result would have varied only slightly."

Kirk was thoughtful. "There are few people who have never felt the sting of alienation." He regarded his friend, carefully choosing his words as the idea formed. "But sometimes, we try too hard. We all need to be wanted, but when that becomes the most important thing in our lives, we become too vulnerable."

"As they did. As Bereth and Valla... "

"Yes, exactly." Kirk felt the sting of their deaths anew. "We have to care what other people think of us, but it shouldn't be so all-consuming that we lose sight of what we think of ourselves."

"Logic such as that seldom works with Human nature, Captain," Spock's tone was chagrined.

"No." Kirk sighed. "There have always been men like Diogenes, and there always will be, I suppose. Wherever there are people whose needs are unfulfilled, there will be someone waiting to fill them."

The Vulcan shivered slightly in the warm breeze that ruffled their hair. Kirk was instantly mindful of his health. "C'mon, Mr. Spock. You and I have a ship to take care of." He put a hand on the Vulcan's shoulder.

"Yes, Captain."

Together, they left Goodhope Colony for the last time.



*A friend is a person who is for you always. He wants **nothing** from you except that you be yourself. He is the one being with whom you can feel safe. With him you can utter your heart, its badness and its goodness ...A friend is an impregnable citadel of refuge in the strife of existence. It is he that keeps alive your faith in human nature, that makes you believe that it is a good universe. He is the antidote to despair, the elixir of hope, the tonic for depression... Give to him without reluctance.*

--Anonymous--

Allow the editors a bit of nepotism as we include the following poem. While working on the zine, we discovered it one morning, discreetly placed on the desk by a rather timid fourteen-year-old poet. In keeping with our theme of continuation, the merging of past and present, we felt this represented the continuity of our Star Trek dream. We offer it now, from the future.

Someone To Need

*When you need someone to hold on to
And there's no one there to hold,
You sometimes feel mistreated
And not too very bold.*

*There are times when life is hard
And it seems nothing's on your side.
You feel like you want to burst
But all that you do is hide.*

*You know that I understand you
But somehow I don't fit in
Because you always seem to block me
From the needs you have within.*

*I'll always be there by you
So don't fear I'll disappear
Because I know you need me,
And I will always be there.*

*I hope you understand me
In the ways that I have said.
I know you'll always trust me
In whatever lies ahead.*

Renée Diane Volker

WE REACH...

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THE WORLD IS SO EMPTY IF ONE THINKS ONLY OF MOUNTAINS,
RIVERS, AND CITIES; BUT TO KNOW SOMEONE WHO THINKS
AND FEELS WITH US, AND WHO, THOUGH DISTANT IS CLOSE
TO US IN SPIRIT, THIS MAKES THE EARTH FOR US AN
INHABITED GARDEN.

-- GOETHE --

SHORE LEAVE IV -- it's not too early, folks!

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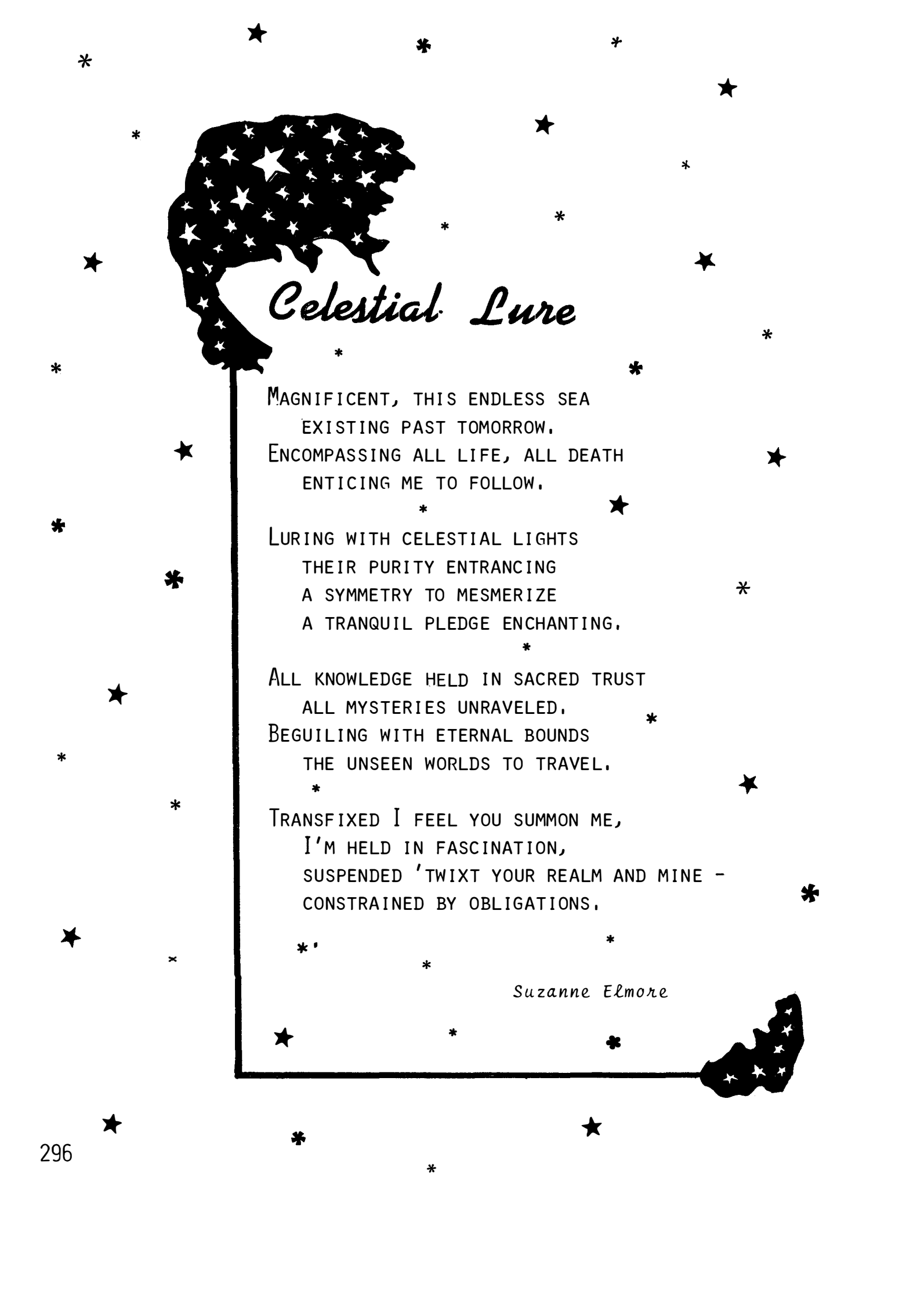
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Celestial Lure

MAGNIFICENT, THIS ENDLESS SEA
EXISTING PAST TOMORROW,
ENCOMPASSING ALL LIFE, ALL DEATH
ENTICING ME TO FOLLOW.

LURING WITH CELESTIAL LIGHTS
THEIR PURITY ENTRANCING
A SYMMETRY TO MESMERIZE
A TRANQUIL PLEDGE ENCHANTING.

ALL KNOWLEDGE HELD IN SACRED TRUST
ALL MYSTERIES UNRAVELED,
BEGUILING WITH ETERNAL BOUNDS
THE UNSEEN WORLDS TO TRAVEL.

TRANSFIXED I FEEL YOU SUMMON ME,
I'M HELD IN FASCINATION,
SUSPENDED 'TWINXT YOUR REALM AND MINE -
CONSTRAINED BY OBLIGATIONS.

Suzanne Elmore

